Wings over Europe

Wings

OVER

E U R O P E

A Dramatic Extravaganza on a Pressing Theme

By ROBERT NICHOLS and
MAURICE BROWNE

new york Covici-Friede publishers
1929

Copyright, 1929.

Copyright, 1928, under International Copyright Union Berne.
All Rights Reserved under International American Copyright Union 1910,
By Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne.

First Printing, January, 1929
Second Printing, January, 1929

"This play in its printed form is designed for the reading public only. All dramatic rights in it are fully protected by copyrights, both in the United States and Great Britain, and no public or private performance—professional or amateur—may be given without the written permission of the Theatre Guild and the payment of royalty. As the courts have also ruled that the public reading of a play for pay or where tickets are sold constitutes a performance, no such reading may be given except under the conditions above stated. Anyone disregarding the author's rights renders himself liable to prosecution. Communications should be sent to The Theatre Guild, Inc., 245 West 52nd St., New York City."

TYPOGRAPHY BY S. A. JACOBS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY STRATFORD PRESS, NEW YORK

CONTENTS

ACT I PAGE 1
ACT II PAGE 59
ACT III PAGE 113

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

WALTER GRANTLY	*Prime Minister*
LORD SUNNINGDALE	*Lord Privy Seal*
LORD DEDHAM	*Lord High Chancellor*
MATTHEW GRINDLE	*Chancellor of the Exchequer*
SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON	*Secretary of State for Home Affairs*
EVELYN ARTHUR	*Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*
RICHARD STAPP	*Secretary of State for War*
LORD COSSINGTON	*Secretary of State for the Dominions*
ESME FAULKINER	*Secretary of State for the Air*
SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT	*First Lord of the Admiralty*
LORD VIVIAN VERE	*President of the Board of Education*
ST. JOHN PASCOE	*Attorney General*
H. G. DUNNE	*First Commissioner of Works*

OTHER CHARACTERS

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT	*The Prime Minister's Nephew*
SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL SIR HENRY HAND	*Neurological Specialists*
ALBERT CUMMINS	*A Labourer*
HART-PLIMSOLL	*A Clerk in the Foreign Office*
TAGGERT	*A Mechanic*

A Police Superintendent, Two Cabinet Messengers, Four Men Carrying a Body

PLACE	*No. 10 Downing Street*
TIME	*To-morrow morning*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

This play was presented by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre on the evening of December tenth, 1928, with the following cast.

WALTER GRANTLY
Prime Minister — ERNEST LAWFORD

LORD SUNNINGDALE
Lord Privy Seal — JOHN DUNN

LORD DEDHAM
Lord High Chancellor — FRANK ELLIOTT

MATTHEW GRINDLE
Chancellor of the Exchequer — JOSEPH KILGOUR

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON
Secretary of State for Home Affairs — NICHOLAS JOY

EVELYN ARTHUR
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs — FRANK CONROY

RICHARD STAPP
Secretary of State for War — HUGH BUCKLER

LORD COSSINGTON
Secretary of State for the Dominions — THOMAS A. BRAIDON

ESME FAULKINER
Secretary of State for the Air — CHARLES FRANCIS

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT
First Lord of the Admiralty GRANT STEWART

LORD VIVIAN VERE
President of the Board of Education
ROBERT RENDEL

ST. JOHN PASCOE
Attorney General GEORGE GRAHAM

H. G. DUNNE
First Commissioner of Works GORDON RICHARDS

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT ALEXANDER KIRKLAND

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL EDWARD LESTER

SIR HENRY HAND A. P. KAYE

HART-PLIMSOLL WHEELER DRYDEN

TAGGART CHARLES CARDON

TWO CABINET MESSENGERS
LINEL BEVANS AND WALTER SCOTT

The Production was directed by Rouben Mamoulian.
The Setting was designed by Raymond Sovey.

Wings over Europe

WINGS OVER EUROPE

ACT I

SCENE: The obliging Muse has planted us where, passing between the Horse Guards Parade and Birdcage Walk, we have perhaps wished that for a moment—just long enough to have a peep—we might be in the Cabinet Council Room at No. 10 Downing Street. We have our backs to the Horse Guards Parade and are looking towards the Georgian clock on the marble mantelpiece, set precisely in the middle of the farther wall. A cheerful fire is burning in the grate, but we can scarcely see it because the entire middle of the cream-panelled, bookshelved room is occupied by a lengthy table, round the circumference of which are neatly arranged no less than thirteen (ominous number) leather-covered blotting-books, as if to hem in the long array of ink-pots, stationery boxes, etc., which form, as it were, the backbone of the table. Chief among these inkpots, right under the eye of the clock, we notice the King of the Inkpots, more massive than his brethren, and rightly conclude that it is before this inkpot, with his back to the fire, that Britain's Prime Minister is accustomed to sit. How pleasant is fancy: we—my fellow-author and I—seat ourselves in two august armchairs and, leaning back for a moment to

savour Ministerial privilege, survey the room. It is a cheerful room, much more cheerful than might be expected by you or us (who somehow had the notion that the making of history was a gloomy process likely to leave on immediate surroundings a desponding portentousness); in point of fact, the sunlight of this spring morning, falling on our left through the two deep double-paned windows (double, we presume, to keep out sound), gently gilds the dark carpet below them and the corners of the table, equipped with writing materials, which stands between. Yes, the room is cheerful and comfortable enough, and the bookshelves, packed with brown leather-jerkined volumes of law and flanking the mantelpiece behind us, give us so certain, if subdued, a feeling of authority that, should the tall double doors to the ante-room on our right open, and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs himself appear in the area behind the pillars which stand before those double doors, who knows but that, taking casual pencils from the trays before us, we might not tap our teeth with them and say: "Ah, Mr. Arthur, we are giving you the day off. These chairs are, as you see, adequately occupied: the Prime Minister's by myself, and yours, next to it, by my fellow-author. Pray, come again to-morrow . . ." and, having so delivered ourselves, point to the door on our left or right rear, as if to dismiss the protagonist of our play

to one of the offices of the private secretaries. . . . But the Muse has indulged us far enough, and silently beckons us into the auditorium.

We are just in time to see Two Messengers begin to move that row of chairs which flanked the wall opposite us, when we sat where we had no right to be, up to their appropriate stations at the table. Now the elder of the Messengers halts a moment to look at the clock, reading half-past nine, casts a farewell glance round the great table, and, with a cough by way of signal to his fellow, prepares to withdraw: when the Prime Minister who, all this time—oblivious of our creative selves—has been standing warming his hands at the fire, turns round. What is he like? He is in well-preserved later middle age. He is a country gentleman and a Conservative. He wears pince-nez. For the present let us be content with that; perhaps, when the Cabinet Committee is met, we may learn more.

PRIME MINISTER: Tell Sir Berkeley Rummel and Sir Henry Hand that I'd be obliged if they'd step in here, directly they've finished their examination.

The Messengers go towards the door.

Voices are heard in the ante-room.

All right. Don't bother. Tell my nephew I'd like to see him in about ten minutes.

The ante-room door opens.

The Messengers go out.

As the Messengers go, Sir Berkeley Rummel, tall, clean-shaven, gold-spectacled, grizzled; and Sir Henry Hand, stoutish, bearded, philosophically-twinkling, enter.

Well, gentlemen, the famous room—itself! Are you duly . . . awed? I do like to toast myself for a few minutes before a Cabinet Committee—puts me in the mood, you know. Besides, most of our visitors like to see me here. Nice room, not too grave, just grave enough—nice politician, not too grave—just grave enough—the same in your profession—my little grand-daughter does make me laugh so—cheerfulness will keep breaking in, as Johnson used to remark—(*And then, suddenly—for all this is simply method that has grown to habit*)—What's the verdict, Sir Berkeley?

The Physicians exchange glances.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Sir Henry and I are in complete agreement. Your nephew is perfectly normal.

PRIME MINISTER: Certain?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Absolutely.

SIR HENRY HAND: No doubt whatever.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, well.

SIR HENRY HAND: The young man is what is popularly known as highly-strung, but not more so than any sensitive man of his attainments. Extraordinary results only originate in fine organizations. He is the type of artist-scientist, a type not uncommon among great physicists. Pascal belonged to it, and Newton, at least mentally.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL *Taking up tale*: Charles Darwin, one of the sanest men who ever lived, was of a not dissimilar type. Your nephew, Mr. Grantly, though highly-strung, as Sir Henry says, is altogether normal.

PRIME MINISTER: How did he take the examination? Did he spot what you were after?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: No, no. Oh, dear, no. No, we told him that—as he's staying with you here—you had asked us to your breakfast table that we might make his acquaintance, because we had a special interest in the neurological make-up of men of remarkable aptitudes, above all, of eminent physicists. He said he was honored. Completely unsuspecting.

SIR HENRY HAND: Completely.

PRIME MINISTER: No trace of . . . megalomania?

The Physicians cannot refrain from the exchange of a mutual smile and shrug.

SIR HENRY HAND: Most certainly not. On the contrary, Mr. Lightfoot is extremely modest.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: We do well to remember, Mr. Grantly, that that young man will be remembered when we, with all our temporal eminence, are completely forgotten. A disconcerting thought.

PRIME MINISTER: H'm . . . didn't tell you his latest?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: No; about that he appeared almost morbidly secretive.

SIR HENRY HAND: Not morbidly.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: I was not speaking pathologically.

PRIME MINISTER: How much do you know?

SIR HENRY HAND: About his latest discovery? Nothing.

PRIME MINISTER: No, about . . .

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Ah! Precisely. Yes. He told us that, as a boy, he had had an instructor to whom he was much devoted——

SIR HENRY HAND: Extraordinarily devoted—

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: And this early instructor stole his first results—passed them off as his own—results not of world importance, like some of his later discoveries, but of great theoretical interest and very dear to the boy, because they were his first.

PRIME MINISTER: He was sixteen.

SIR HENRY HAND: Tch! Tch!

PRIME MINISTER: Anything more?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Well . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Yes?

SIR HENRY HAND: Rumor. Mere rumor.

PRIME MINISTER: From him?

SIR HENRY HAND: Oh, dear me, no.

PRIME MINISTER: Then?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: People will talk, Mr. Grantly.

PRIME MINISTER: And we listen. Yes, gentlemen, it's true; my sister, Francis Lightfoot's mother

—you remember, she died about four years ago? Poor Francis—yes, it is quite true that she—*turns his back on them and warms his hands*—she had a lover.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: The instructor?

Prime Minister nods.

And the boy found out?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.—*Turns about again*—Since then he won't even communicate with any other physicist—not on any account.

SIR HENRY HAND: That accounts for the secretiveness.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Then how does he—

SIR HENRY HAND: He publishes everything himself. His father left him a very handsome fortune. And there he lives—did he tell you that? Stuck in the country, spending heaven knows what in his laboratory, and seeing nobody but his assistants.

SIR HENRY HAND: Remarkable.

PRIME MINISTER: Twenty-five years old and thirty thousand a year! An actress and an interest in racehorses would be more healthy.

SIR HENRY HAND: I fear I cannot agree with you there. However, if he is a trifle inhuman—I can't say I found him so—he'll soften in time. Sir Ernest Rutherford tells me that he is bound to receive the Nobel Prize this year.

PRIME MINISTER: Really?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: You may take it as semi-official.

PRIME MINISTER: I'd rather it was the Derby. All the same—at twenty-five! Well done, Francis!

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL *rubbing it in*: You must admit it doesn't look like . . . abnormality . . . megalomania.

PRIME MINISTER: No, Sir Berkeley, I have to admit it does not.

SIR HENRY HAND: I might as well examine Sir Berkeley!

The Prime Minister speaks loudly, for a youthful face has peered round the jamb of the softly-opened great doors to the ante-room.

PRIME MINISTER: The Medical Research Council had better send a deputation.—Come in, Francis.

SIR BERKELEY *Taking the cue*: Thank you. If you should care at any time to refer to us with re-

gard to the fitness of the individual mentioned, we shall be more than glad to repeat the testimony we have already given you. Good day, Mr. Grantly. I thank you for a very pleasant beginning to an arduous morning and for the honor, the great honor, of meeting your illustrious and elusive nephew.

Enter Francis Lightfoot. He is twenty-five years old, but looks much younger. He is dressed in a striped gray double-breasted coat and waist-coat, gray "bags," soft brown shoes; he wears no tie; all his clothes are well cut, but worn with carelessness. He is slightly below medium height and of graceful build; he has small hands and feet and a shock of brown hair. His face is very beautiful and rather unearthly. To prosaic people there is something rather noxious in this unearthliness, just as to poetic people there is something angelic in it. He has fine eyes which, in repose, alternate between dreaminess and daring; in action they betray, as do his brows, nostrils, and mouth, a fiercely petulant wilfulness and an extreme pride—a pride entirely what the Bible would call "ghostly." His manner is nervous and constrained, for he is not at his ease in the world of affairs. When, however, he is possessed by an idea or principle and must strive for it, all his awkwardness vanishes; his voice, a high tenor, becomes eloquent with an eloquence which is, however, somewhat marred by

shrillness of timbre; and his gestures and bearing display a certain nobility as fiery as it is un-English. At present he is evidently suffering from a profound inward happy excitement, but is endeavoring to appear calm, and this endeavor results in his casting quick and uneasy glances in every direction, but especially at the group by the fire; nor is this nervousness concealed, but rather emphasized, by the manner in which he stands with his feet planted on the base of one of the columns, while he swings from it at arm's length by one hand.

SIR HENRY HAND: Good-day. It has been a great pleasure—a most remarkable genius.

They turn to go.

Francis Lightfoot does not change his position.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Good-bye, Mr. Lightfoot. *Genially.* We trust you will favor us with further opportunities to pursue our investigations on your distinguished person.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I am sane?

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: My dear Mr. Lightfoot——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: That's all right. Good-bye, Sir Berkeley. Am I sane, Sir Henry?

SIR HENRY HAND: Of course, of course. Nobody——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Good-bye.

SIR BERKELEY RUMMEL: Good-bye.

SIR HENRY HAND: Good-bye.

Exchanging glances, the Physicians withdraw.

Exeunt Physicians.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *advancing*: Well, Uncle, that about completes it. You have to accept it all now.

PRIME MINISTER: I never doubted it, my boy.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: But you wondered if I mightn't have been . . . "overworking" shall we call it?

PRIME MINISTER: In my position, a layman . . . the Cabinet.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I forgive you—I could forgive anybody—almost anybody—this morning. *Swings himself on to a corner of the table.* You know, I've never cried since mother . . . Well, there were tears in my eyes as I dressed this morning. . . . *staring in front of him.* Think! To-day, for the first time in history, Man is free! *Sudden change*

of tone. All the same, I wish I was back in my laboratory—I shall be glad when it's over—excitement, except in my laboratory, always makes me sick.

PRIME MINISTER: Don't let yourself get excited, my boy. It's not going to be easy. I fear you may have some disappointments in front of you.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Disappointments?

PRIME MINISTER *taking him past precipices at a good round trot*: Man will be man; but everybody will, I am sure, do their best to help you——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Help me? I am going to help them.

PRIME MINISTER: To help you help them, I should have said. Well, well, all is ready. You'll seat yourself just behind me and draw up when the battle begins.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Battle!

PRIME MINISTER *who has timed his stroke*: Public affairs are always a battle—I don't know why —*genially*—perhaps it's because, as the Chinese sage used to say, those who speak don't know, and those who know don't speak.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I am going to make a statement, nothing more. You and the Cabinet Committee will then act on it for the public good.

PRIME MINISTER *soothingly*: Of course, of course. *Returning to his point*. But has it ever struck you, Francis, that there's nothing on earth—except religion—on which men are so divided as the public good?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Not when the question is large enough, and the issue simple.

PRIME MINISTER: It takes genius to tell which questions are large, and, except Evelyn Arthur, there is no genius in my Cabinet. The rest of us are just, I hope, sound men doing our best. As to a simple issue, in a public life of over thirty years, *cheerily*, I have never yet met one.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: But, Uncle, if I were to say to you: "I am a terrible angel and I come to offer you a choice on which you must decide in the next five minutes—and that choice is 'Will you live or die?' "

PRIME MINISTER: I fear that in my public capacity I should certainly have to say, "I choose to live"; in my private capacity . . . I don't know . . . my son killed, my daughters married, my wife dead . . . If I hadn't my grand-daughter——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: But you have. There's Marjorie, and there's your duty. So the issue's simple, and you say, "I choose to live."

PRIME MINISTER *shrugging*: Yes, I suppose so.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *ardently*: Very well. That is precisely the question I put to you, and not to you only, but to Europe and, for the matter of that, to the entire world. And, *triumphantly*, the answer will be the same—for the world will have life and will have it more abundantly!

PRIME MINISTER: Don't you—er—just a trifle—in the enthusiasm of an adept, you understand—overstate the case?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Not one jot.

PRIME MINISTER *leaving it*: Well, if the issue's as simple as that, let us hope the others will see it. Most men want to live, I believe; certainly most of my Cabinet do, if only for the abundance of—er—life, which will be theirs when they step into my shoes. Especially Mr. Richard Stapp—Daredevil Dick . . . Ah, well. *Change of tone.* If I were you, I'd concentrate on the Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Evelyn Arthur?

PRIME MINISTER: He has done more for the progress of science than any living public man. He has the charm of Puck, the wisdom of Prospero, the coolest—some people suggest the coldest—temperament in Europe; but, above all, courage, immense

courage. My wife used to say: "Arthur is courageous because he doesn't give a damn, not the remotest fraction of a damn." But I don't know . . . Anyhow, I'm very fond of him. Go after him, my boy. A fatal enemy, a good friend so long—and just so long—as he thinks your case—unkind people might add your position in the game—is sound.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: My case is sound. I have no position.

PRIME MINISTER: Every man, being a member of society, must have a position.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I have no position. I am a scientist—that is simply a mind, the Mind of Man, if you like. Position? No. We are above them.

PRIME MINISTER *uneasily*: I hope my colleagues will understand you.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Mr. Arthur will.

PRIME MINISTER *heartened*: Well, play to Arthur.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I've no intention of "playing" to anyone. If Mr. Arthur takes me, well and good. If not——

PRIME MINISTER: If not?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *with a gust of angry*

pride: On their heads—*checking himself, cheerful.* Oh, no, it'll be all right. They've no alternative. *A piteous note coming into his voice.* This is somehow all much more difficult than I expected.

PRIME MINISTER *kindly*: Physics and politics are not quite the same. Yours is a perfect world of form and number. Ours is—well—little Marjorie calls me Old Giddy Gray-Hair. But take my word for this, my boy: I've done my best to understand what you've told me about your stupendous discovery and to grasp the implications, staggering as they are. I shall do my best for you. *Offers his hand.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *rising*: For me? No! For all men. *Shakes hands.*

PRIME MINISTER *glancing at the open throat*: By the way, do you think you could——? *He indicates the lack of tie.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: My neck's perfectly clean.

PRIME MINISTER: A tie would—er——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Er?

PRIME MINISTER: My colleagues—the impression——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: If my statement can't produce an impression, a tie won't.

PRIME MINISTER: But which will they encounter first?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *fretting*: What a lot of preliminaries there do seem to freeing Mankind. *Viciously*, I hate ties!

PRIME MINISTER: But for so great an occasion, for the day on which Mankind IS——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: All right—the lovely green one. *Dashes away.*

PRIME MINISTER *calling after Francis Lightfoot:* Green?

One of the great doors has opened.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: For the Birthday of Humanity!

At the door Francis Lightfoot all but collides with the play's protagonist:

Evelyn Arthur enters, smiles charmingly and a little deprecatingly, as if smiling at his own indulgence no less than at the young man's impetuosity.

Francis Lightfoot gives him a laughing stare.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *mystifyingly*: Green! Green.

Exit Francis Lightfoot.

EVELYN ARTHUR *still smiling and carefully closing the door*: Dear, dear me, is humanity having

yet another birthday? *Turns about and advances.* I trust not. Celebrations are usually followed by headaches, and birthdays are for children . . . *Patting the Prime Minister on the shoulder, for Evelyn Arthur seldom shakes hands.* Well, how are you? No green about you, I trust.

PRIME MINISTER: No, Evelyn. I'm in the pink.

EVELYN ARTHUR: That's right . . . Green, I suppose, for hope—horrid monosyllable, "hope"—out of place in the mouth of any really Civilized Man.

One has the feeling that these two words "Civilized Man" have for Evelyn Arthur the reality that other words—shall we say such as "Humanity"?—have for other natures, so distinctly do the capitals go up as he enunciates them.

PRIME MINISTER: Are any of us really civilized? With one inevitable exception.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Ah, my dear Walter, we have had no civilization yet, only civilizations.

PRIME MINISTER: Is my nephew civilized?

EVELYN ARTHUR: So that was your genius nephew, the wicked cause of my leaving my last piece of toast—always the best. Well, I forgive him. He takes after his mother, Walter; a very beautiful

woman. His face reminds me of some wonderful person I can't quite call to mind—Donatello's St. George, perhaps,—no, that's not quite it . . .

PRIME MINISTER: He'll be back in a moment. He's staying with me, you know, upstairs . . . I told you something of this morning's business on the telephone; now I want you to feel his bumps, so to speak.

EVELYN ARTHUR: A charming task. D'you know, when I last saw the great Einstein, he talked of little else but this prodigy? I mayn't, I suppose, ask——

PRIME MINISTER: No. I promised him to say nothing till the Committee—Ssh!! Here he comes!

Evelyn Arthur turns to the fire.

Francis Lightfoot enters, wearing a green tie.

Francis, you know Mr. Arthur.

Francis Lightfoot stops short.

Evelyn Arthur turns about.

EVELYN ARTHUR *holding out his hand*: Ah, so the green referred to the tie—how d'you do? That curious and well-beloved acquaintance of my remote Oxford youth, Walter Pater, always used to wear one—I can't say it suited him as it does you. Do any of you young people read Pater nowadays?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *in alarm*: Where are you going, Uncle?

PRIME MINISTER: "Big fleas have little fleas—"
And Ministers have Secretaries. . . .

The Prime Minister seeks out his Secretary in the left hand room.

Exit Prime Minister.

EVELYN ARTHUR *pleasantly*: A singularly poor rhyme—even for Downing Street. You care for poetry, Mr. Lightfoot? I see you have a book in your pocket—physics, I suppose—well, it too has poetry, the grandest of all. May I see it?

Francis Lightfoot hurriedly hands it to him. Ah—Shelley.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: It was given me years ago. My mother . . . Next to Clark Maxwell, I—I love Shelley.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Clark Maxwell? Ah, yes. And Shelley . . . *Pretending to turn over the leaves.* Our only romantic poet with scientific leanings——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Chemistry and physics. Professor Whitehead——

EVELYN ARTHUR *Reading*: "A pool of treach-

erous and tremendous calm"—what a marvelous line! I beg your pardon. *He closes the book.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Professor Whitehead—*Evelyn Arthur seems trying to recollect*—the man who wrote "Principia Mathematica" with Bertrand Russell.

EVELYN ARTHUR *feigning*: Of course, how stupid of me.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: He pointed out to me, in the days when I used to—when he used to meet those fellows—that, had Shelley been born to-day, he would have been a great chemist. You won't laugh at me, Mr. Arthur? I love these poems; sometimes they seem almost like my own voice talking to me—for Physics are my passion and Humanity my religion.

EVELYN ARTHUR *gazes at the ground, then gives Francis Lightfoot a sharp glance. Easily:* I was wondering only just now whose face yours reminded me of.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Mine?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Yes, you bear a remarkable likeness to Shelley.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Really? What an honor!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Hadn't it struck you?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *diffidently*: Well, to be quite candid, once or twice . . . *with judicial enthusiasm*: And then, you see, I can't help knowing that, in my sphere as physicist, I'm his equal as poet.

The Prime Minister enters softly.

Evelyn Arthur exchanges a glance with him and holds up a warning finger.

EVELYN ARTHUR *without irony*: That gives you a very high position.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Of course, but I shall be worthy of it. Has my uncle told you anything?

EVELYN ARTHUR: No.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Well——

The Prime Minister seems about to steal away when loud voices and hearty laughter are heard in the anteroom.

Damn! There they are. Hello, uncle, I didn't hear you come in.

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't want to disturb you.

A peal of laughter.

The Cabinet Committee is——

The door opens, the Cabinet Committee begins to come in, several members are in conversation——

EVELYN ARTHUR: Francis—Mr. Lightfoot, I mean——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *smiling*: Oh, please: Francis.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Thank you. I don't know what you're going to say or do at this meeting but, if I can be of any assistance, pray rely on me.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Thank you, thank you so much.

EVELYN ARTHUR *change of tone*: I'd stay where you are; wait till they're seated. *He smiles and advances.* Hello, Hal. Good morning, Stapp.

RICHARD STAPP: What's it all about? Goin' to the country?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I think not. *He greets a friend or two, then sits down to the right of the Prime Minister's chair.*

MATTHEW GRINDLE: I trust, Mr. Grantly, that we shall find time to-day to proceed to our consideration of budget proposals?

PRIME MINISTER *uneasily hastening on*: That depends, Mr. Grindle; that depends.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *to Richard Stapp*: So I replied that if necessary I would move in the police. Of course, they gave way. Government's Government. *To the Prime Minister.* Yes, Grantly?

PRIME MINISTER: Congratulate you on your speech last night. *Change of tone.* Help us to get 'em started.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Anything wrong?

PRIME MINISTER: Nothing. I only want to get started.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Certainly, certainly. *He sits down. Genially waving.* Come on, you fellows.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Hello, hello; starters waitin'! *He sits down.*

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: No jibbin' at the post.

Still chatting, they hasten to their seats.

LORD COSSINGTON *calling*: Perfectly charming. Delighted. Of course I'll come.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *growling cheerfully*: Clear the course. Clear the course. Cossington, we'll be charmed an' delighted if you'll sit down.

LORD COSSINGTON *sitting down*: Where's-s the turtle-s-soup? S-sunningdale's-s hungry.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Boys! Boys!

The Prime Minister raps the table.

Talk dies down.

Now that they are seated, it would be pleasant to review their appearances but, inasmuch as each is a synthesis arrived at through hints afforded by the only models available—namely, living and lately dead personages—the Muse contents herself with asserting that, in the Fourth Dimension of Anglo-Saxon Dramatic Art, where all is relative to something outside that art, and our quantum of Truth has the habit of perforcedly undergoing such sudden transformations as would surprise even a Niels Bohr, the appearance of these gentlemen is everything which the Censor permits and nothing which he doesn't. You and I may think that the Prime Minister reminds us a little, in some respects, of Sir Arthur Campbell Bannerman, Lord Oxford, and Mr. Baldwin; the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, of Lord Salisbury, Lord Balfour, and Sir Austen Chamberlain, and the others of a number of eminent personages, with whose outward aspects the Daily Press has made us not unfamiliar. But we assure you that, till the Censor assures us that we are not mistaken,

the less said about these misapprehensions of ours, and the sooner we all get on with the play the better. Accordingly——

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen—are those doors shut, Pascoe? Make quite sure, will you?

H. G. Dunne rises and does so.

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Mr. Grantly, there's a stranger in the room——

PRIME MINISTER: One minute, Grindle——

H. G. Dunne returns.

Thank you, Mr. Dunne . . . *He raps again.* Gentlemen: *complete silence*, you have perhaps already noticed three unusual facts about this morning's proceedings. First, we are meeting earlier than usual; second, there is a stranger present—draw up your chair, Francis. *Francis Lightfoot draws up his chair between the Prime Minister and Evelyn Arthur.* Third, there is nothing on our Agenda paper to account for his presence. The last fact explains the first two. The matter we have to consider is of so grave, unique, and confidential a nature—*he pauses*, that I have not thought fit to give to any outside person, however close to us and our work, any intimation of its nature. For the same reason, even the Secretary has been excluded, so making a return to

the precedent set in this room a few years ago, when we sat as a Cabinet Committee—as we sit now—conducting a war.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: War!

Murmurs of annoyance at this interruption.

PRIME MINISTER: Francis! *Evelyn Arthur whispers to Francis Lightfoot. He subsides.*

PRIME MINISTER *louder and more rapidly*: You know me well enough, gentlemen, to be sure that I do not take such steps without due cause, and I should like to make it plain from the start that, extraordinary as the statements you are shortly to hear must sound to our inexpert ears, they are well-founded, and I take full responsibility for them. I need not enlarge on the capacities of Francis Lightfoot: his name and achievements are familiar to every reader of the daily press, despite the fact that, as perhaps some of you have heard, not only does he not associate with his fellow-physicists, but he also shuns all publicity and is known to the world only by two things: his immense scientific prestige and his reputation as a recluse. I will therefore content myself, in respect to his capabilities, with two facts only: last time Mr. Arthur saw the world-famous Albert Einstein, Professor Einstein spoke of little else but Mr. Lightfoot's work—that is the first fact.

This is the second: I have this morning heard, on unimpeachable authority, that Mr. Lightfoot will receive next year, at the unprecedented age of twenty-five, the Nobel Prize. *Pause.* Did you know that, Francis?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *calmly*: No. Go on.

The members of the Cabinet Committee look at one another.

PRIME MINISTER: Incidentally, this young man happens to be my nephew. I have known him from childhood, and know him to be completely truthful. However, since great studies sometimes put a severe strain on the mind, I have consulted the two greatest nerve-specialists in the realm, Sir Berkeley Rummel and Sir Henry Hand. They have examined my nephew, and both decisively declare him in perfect health, not merely of body, but of mind. Now, gentlemen, this may seem to you a curious, a positively unprecedented prelude. But what you are going to hear is unprecedented. Before introducing Mr. Lightfoot, I should like to add three things. First, Mr. Lightfoot proposes to make a statement only: action he leaves to us. Second, his is the world of physics, a very complicated world, and accordingly he undertakes to accommodate his exposition to our lay intelligences, craving only your most ear-

nest attention and that indulgence due to youth and inexperience in public affairs. Third and last, gentlemen, I—well—I hesitate to say what I was going to say—but—*abandoning his professional manner.* Well—many of you are old friends—we've worked together—this morning we have on our hands a problem of such a nature that . . . briefly, gentlemen, the very thought of it makes me feel my years.

Richard Stapp drops his pencil.

The Prime Minister gives him a hard glance. But, gentlemen, with your help—*his eye sweeps round and rests finally on Evelyn Arthur*—with your help I trust we shall tackle it in that spirit of hopeful resolution for which this Ministry has, we like to believe, made itself famous. *He pauses.* Gentlemen, I present to you my nephew, Mr. Francis Lightfoot.

Francis Lightfoot rises.

Evelyn Arthur whispers to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister rises again.

Mr. Arthur suggests that, in view of possible questions, I run rapidly over the names round this table, that my nephew may gather who's who on this Committee, and what Department each represents in the Cabinet. *Pause.* Let's see, I'll take it right to left. Evelyn Arthur you know—he's Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Grindle, Chancellor of the Excheq-

uer, is next to him. Beyond Mr. Grindle, Lord Dedham, the Lord Chancellor: the enemy of the law's enemies! Then, St. John Pascoe, Attorney General. . . . Now we come to the Secretaries of State—I have 'em all, except Evelyn, opposite me, so I can keep my eye on 'em; especially on our Daredevil Dick, Mr. Richard Stapp, Secretary of State for War—*continuing*—Sir Romilly Blount, Navy—Esme Faulkiner, Air—Sir Humphrey Haliburton, Home Office; we usually call him Happy Hal and he hasn't yet jugged us for it. Dedham damns 'em, Hal jugs 'em. Lord Cossington, the Dominions . . . That completes the Secretaries of State . . . Mr. Dunne, whose proudest boast is that he's an engineer, not a politician, Office of Works—Lord Vivian Vere, Education—and Lord Sunningdale——

LORD SUNNINGDALE *in great good spirits*: The only man that ever won the Grand National, the Oaks, an' the Derby in the same year.

PRIME MINISTER: Known on the course as "Old Sunny," but in here he's only Lord Privy Seal.

Laughter.

The Prime Minister resumes his seat.

So does Francis Lightfoot.

The Prime Minister signs for Francis Lightfoot to

rise again, but, before he can do so, Lord Dedham intervenes.

LORD DEDHAM: Prime Minister, before Mr. Lightfoot begins, I would like to ask why he honors us with a statement and does not wait for us to take notice of it through the usual channels of the learned societies.

EVELYN ARTHUR *deftly*: May I, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, answer that perfectly legitimate enquiry? Mr. Lightfoot has his private reasons: I am acquainted with some of them: they are honorable and painful: with Mr. Lightfoot's permission I shall be glad to explain them to any one of you subsequently, in private. Personally, I consider that Mr. Lightfoot does well to disclose his results, the product of immense labor and—I use the word advisedly — genius . . . to disclose his results, whatever they may be, to a body of men whose duty it is to guard and nourish the most varied and numerous confederation of human beings on the globe.

LORD DEDHAM: Thank you. I beg your pardon, Mr. Lightfoot. Pray proceed.

Francis Lightfoot rises.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *nervously*: Prime Minister and gentlemen, when I——

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: One moment. Mr. Lightfoot's father was, I trust, o' British nationality?

PRIME MINISTER: More Cheshire than Cheshire cheese. Any thing else? . . . No. Go on, my boy.

Francis Lightfoot rises again.

Sotto voce: Take your time.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *haltingly*: Gentlemen, when—when I first made the discovery I—I'm going to tell you about, I wondered whom I—I ought to tell about it. You see, of course I'm opposed to all governments, for all governments are founded on force——

LORD DEDHAM: Eh, what's that? What's that?

Evelyn Arthur holds up a remonstrative hand.

Lord Dedham grunts and subsides.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: At first I thought of handing over my discovery to all Mankind through the League of Nations. But people say all sorts of things about the League, about its lack of prestige and efficiency; besides, neither the United States, nor even Russia, are members. Then, too, you see, I was bothered, because I don't know any of the League's officials. Well, the next largest—what d'you call it

—political entity representing the maximum variety of races is the British Empire; and you're its representatives. You know, I hope you won't mind my saying this, but that bothered me frightfully for, all his life Shelley was opposed to the British Government.

Murmurs.

You see, I look on Shelley as one of the greatest benefactors of Mankind.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Shelley?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I share Mr. Lightfoot's enthusiasm for Shelley . . . Shall we try to avoid interrupting him?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Of course, to-day, Shelley IS generally recognized, by intelligent people; some of you even took part in his Centenary celebrations.

Laughter, in which Lord Sunningdale joins.

Besides, my mother, though she hated governments, —of course she knew most of you—well, just the same, she always used to say that, of all governments, the British used least force in proportion to the members governed; in fact, she used to say that this—this heterogeneous empire's having held together so long was really an extraordinary tribute to

its government—that it showed they relied on the good will of Mankind rather than on fear. Now, the head of this government to-day is—is my mother's favorite brother. "The only man," she used to say to me, "who had never lied to her." That decided me. I told him—about my discovery, I mean. Of course he saw at once its terrific importance; and he advised me, ever so strongly, to bring it directly to the Cabinet, or rather to this Cabinet Committee, to you. I—I admit I hesitated; I couldn't help thinking of China. But finally he did convince me, with many illustrations from history, that there was, on the whole, no community of peoples so devoted to Liberty, Justice, and Humanity as the peoples of the —the British Commonwealth of Nations . . . So here I am. And I'm going to give you the chance to prove that my confidence in you isn't—isn't misplaced.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Just one question—please: Mr. Lightfoot, may I ask, did you ever go to a public school?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *surprised, but polite*: Yes, my father made me . . . I ran away. Why?

LORD VIVIAN VERE: In my capacity as Minister of Education, I was just wondering where you—ah —where you——

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Lightfoot received his scientific training in private.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Thank you.

Francis Lightfoot seems puzzled and vaguely apprehensive. He glances round the faces.

PRIME MINISTER *uneasy*: Go on, Francis. Come to the point.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *rather lamely*: Perhaps I'd better pass over quite a lot that I wanted ever so much to say. *He fingers the papers on the table.* I'll go on to how I made this discovery.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: We're all attention, young man, all attention.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: In science there are two main modes by which great conclusions, like mine, are arrived at. There's the Commonsense Mode; long and arduous spade-work, by lots of people, followed by a stroke of luck; and there's the Uncommonsense Mode; that depends on a unique combination of gifts in a particular individual—Newton, for instance, or Einstein, or myself. People who don't like or understand the Uncommonsense Mode call it Inspired Guessing. My own genius is for short cuts. And my discovery is a by-product of a five-year-long short cut in an investigation I'm making——

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Here, Mr. Lightfoot, or abroad?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I understand Mr. Lightfoot's laboratory is in North Wales.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: This investigation aims at solving the old riddle: "What is energy?" *Warming up to his subject.* So far as we know—we really know nothing—all energy resolves itself at the last analysis into what's popularly known as electricity —though what electricity is . . . well, none of us know. However, apparently electricity is the thing-in-itself, just as that mysterious thing we call life, which moves in all of us, in me, and in you, is the thing-in-itself. Now, just as life manifests itself in constantly changing structures known as bodies, which tend to perish and be recreated from hour to hour, so electricity manifests itself in the perpetual dance of entities known as negative electrons round a positively charged nucleus. Such groups are, in fact, infinitesimally small solar systems, and of the different combinations of these systems all matter is, as far as we know, made up. It follows, therefore, that the physicist has two main interests—first, the varieties of combinations of these solar systems which, being combined, make up the ninety odd elements of which, in variegated structure, the substance of the universe is composed. And,

second, that force which holds each solar system together; in other words, the thing-in-itself. Now my investigations——

LORD SUNNINGDALE *with geniality*: Prime Minister, may I? *Without waiting for an answer*: Thank you. *To Francis Lightfoot.* Now, look here, young man, I believe an', I take it, the others believe, that you know what you're talkin' about. We like you personally—I like you for your sportin' dig at me—an' I'm sure we've all got the greatest respect for your reputation, your labors, an' your learnin'. But we're politicians, God help us, not professors. *With gentle humor.* Be a good feller: have mercy on a lot of old codgers: cut the cackle an' come to the hosses.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *taken aback*: Lord Sunningdale, I——

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Mr. Lightfoot, I knew your mother, and I didn't love her any the less for not understanding one word in six she said. But I'm only an old-fashioned country squire, who breeds short-horns, and I'm blessed if I can follow all this stuff about infinitesimal solar systems. What's more, I'm a busy man. Parliament's sitting, and I've the deuce of an important deputation, red-hot—I've already put it off twice—coming to see me

this morning. Couldn't you explain to the others after I'm gone, and just give us a bare statement, here and now, of *what your discovery is*?

PRIME MINISTER *anxious*: Well, Francis?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *appealing rather helplessly*: Mr. Arthur . . .

EVELYN ARTHUR: I think you'd better do as they suggest. Our duty is not to assimilate expert knowledge but to act on it. And if your statement is going to be of the nature I—*he breaks off.*

Francis Lightfoot passes his hand over his eyes.

PRIME MINISTER: Come, my boy, I know it's hard for you; I feel for your disappointment. But life is short, and we must govern. Don't think we don't appreciate your labors. We do. But you appealed to us: give us your *results.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Very well, then, very well . . . please let me collect myself a moment. *He sits down, shuts his eyes, and takes his head in his hands as if he felt it spinning.*

The members of the Committee, except Evelyn Arthur, who sits watching Francis Lightfoot, converse together in low voices. Snatches are overheard.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *to Lord Dedham*: So we

taught the Bourse its lesson by lowering the Bank rate——

LORD DEDHAM *in conversation with St. John Pascoe*: Depend upon it, once they see we mean business——

LORD COSSINGTON *to Sir Humphrey Haliburton*: I don't understand——

H. G. DUNNE: The Boiler-Makers' Union is bound to object.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Well, we shall overrule them——

ST. JOHN PASCOE *to Richard Stapp*: The trial has caused a good deal of nervousness, eh?

RICHARD STAPP: Only in the Punjab. And General Mitcheson has that well in hand.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: The execution takes place next Friday?

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Yes.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: No fear of attempts in London?

ST. JOHN PASCOE: We got the only dangerous man this morning. *To Richard Stapp*: At your front door.

RICHARD STAPP: Oho. . . .!

Francis Lightfoot suddenly rises.

The talk dies away, but Sir Humphrey Haliburton and Richard Stapp continue whispering.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *with the sudden spasm of a spring relased*: Gentlemen, I can control . . . the energy . . . in the atom.

Evelyn Arthur's monocle falls.

Francis Lightfoot, palpitating, stares at Sir Humphrey Halliburton and Richard Stapp.

RICHARD STAPP *breaking off his conversation to the Prime Minister*: I beg your pardon. An Oriental gentleman was goin' to take a pot at me this mornin'. Naturally I . . . *to Francis Lightfoot.* Sorry. You said . . .?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *staring in front of him, hoarsely*: I said . . . I can control . . . the energy . . . in the atom.

Evelyn Arthur restores his monocle to its place.

H. G. Dunne jumps up.

H. G. DUNNE *excitedly*: What! Man alive! Is that the . . . ? *To the others*: Gentlemen! D'you realize what that means?

MATTHEW GRINDLE *dryly*: No, Mr. Dunne, we do not; or perhaps I should say, I do not. If you will be so good—we are hoping to hear. *He pulls out his watch.* My Budget proposals——

H. G. DUNNE *losing his head*: Damn your Budget proposals! Go ahead, Lightfoot, rub it in. Tell 'em what's what!

The Prime Minister frowns and raps.

PRIME MINISTER *magisterially*: Mr. Dunne, your engineer's training has given you a certain advantage over some of us, but that is no reason I should have to remind you that you are addressing a Cabinet Committee.

H. G. DUNNE: I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Grindle. *He sits down. Weakly, with traces of hysterical laughter*: But if you knew, if you only knew . . . *Pause. Silence.*

The Prime Minister turns to Francis Lightfoot.

PRIME MINISTER: Go on.

Francis Lightfoot is silent.

Tell them what you told me last night. Tell them what it *means.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *patiently, but not without a trace of scorn*: It all seems so elementary to

me. Well . . . it means that the present, all this, all that you're accustomed to call civilization, is—is relegated at last to its proper place as the confused remembrance of an evil dream of no more account than a child's nightmare. Yesterday, Man was a slave; to-day, he's free. Matter obeys him.

The Cabinet Committee is divided between those who glance at each other and those who carefully refrain from doing so.

LORD DEDHAM *indulging his truculence*: Mr. Lightfoot, I'm Lord Chancellor, and I've risen to my present position by my obstinate preference for facts as opposed to verbiage. Rhapsodies, however eloquent, are not evidence. Stick to facts, please. *He snaps his fingers.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Who the devil d'you think you're talking to?

H. G. DUNNE: Hear, hear!

PRIME MINISTER: Francis——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I've given you facts. I've tried to tell you of the miniature solar systems of the atom, but you wouldn't listen. Well, perhaps you'll listen to this: so far as matter is concerned, what I will to be, will be, and what I will not to be, will not be. Is that fact enough?

PRIME MINISTER: Francis——

LORD DEDHAM: Mr. Lightfoot, kindly refrain from indulging your predilection to mystify. You are here to explain.

H. G. DUNNE: Order!

EVELYN ARTHUR *sweetly*: Lord Dedham, may I remind you that Mr. Lightfoot is here of his own free will?

LORD DEDHAM: This is a Cabinet Committee, and——

EVELYN ARTHUR: Lord Dedham, your position and mine in the world of politics simply do not exist, compared with this young man's in the world of science. We must be patient. Mr. Lightfoot, will you permit me to play the part of magician's assistant for a moment? *There is something so charming and not without a hint of Puck in Evelyn Arthur's glance that*——

Francis Lightfoot smiles assent.

Thank you. Now, gentlemen, here we have a table made of—let me see—oak, isn't it? Yes, oak. Very well. Now, if Mr. Lightfoot were so vulgar as to wish to turn this table into gold, hey, presto, he could do so. And if he happened to dislike it as much as I do, he could, hey, presto, abolish it. Is that clear?

He smiles, takes out his monocle, puts it back, sits down.

LORD DEDHAM: Look here, what are you up to, Arthur, pulling our legs?

EVELYN ARTHUR *with sweet acerbity*: Lord Dedham, you reminded Mr. Lightfoot that he was addressing a Cabinet Committee. Are you reminding me?

LORD DEDHAM: But——

PRIME MINISTER: I suggest that we postpone discussion until the end of Mr. Lightfoot's statement.

Lord Dedham retires into the sulks.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *nervously*: Mr. Arthur has—has put it a little oddly; but—yes, that's what it means. Oh, please, please, don't waste time asking silly questions; consider what you're going to *do*. *Very earnestly and as if repeating a peroration.* You see—the history of Man up to now has been one long horrible narrative of his slavery to matter. To-day I put into your hands power *over* matter; ultimate power over matter; the power of—of a god, to slay and to make alive. Incidentally it means food, shelter, abundance, for everyone. But that's just incidental. Beyond that—a mere matter of

organization—rises the New World, the Summer of Mankind, the Golden Age. Don't you see, gentlemen? It's—Man's free! And now, now, he can live as the sages of all countries have always dreamed he might live—not—not a feebly struggling parasite, not a thing oppressed by needs and fears, with no security, no leisure, but Man, a Titan, a Prometheus, a Prometheus Triumphant, all his days and nights one long hymn of praise to Beauty and to Truth, the Beauty and the Truth which from hour to hour Man discovers and Man creates! *Quietly, exhausted.* That's what it means, gentlemen; that's what my discovery means. You're the first—except my uncle—to know. Now I'm going to leave you to organize. That's your job; the new *organization.* I'll come back, a week from to-day, at the same time. Have your plans ready. *He makes as if to withdraw.*

VOICES: Stop! One minute! He can't go! Where are you off to?

Evelyn Arthur, with a gesture, detains him.

Evelyn Arthur rises.

The Prime Minister raps.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Arthur.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Thank you. Gentlemen, we have just heard a statement which will resound

down the ages. I propose that we tender our thanks——

VOICES: Not so fast! Questions! Easy there!

The Prime Minister raps.

EVELYN ARTHUR:—not only on behalf of our nation but of all humanity——

VOICES: One moment! I move— Wait a bit! Prime Minister——

The Prime Minister raps.

EVELYN ARTHUR:—to the modern Prometheus. That is our first duty, and, I may add, our great honor. If, after Mr. Lightfoot has gone, you gentlemen should desire to ask questions, I think perhaps I might——

VOICES: Yes! No! Not at all! Mr. Lightfoot——

LORD DEDHAM: It's the young man's job. Let him answer.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Prime Minister: I am about to put the vote of thanks. Will anyone second me?

VOICES: No! Wait! We want more!

LORD DEDHAM: Why such a hurry?

Evelyn Arthur and the Prime Minister briefly confer amid continued clamor.

PRIME MINISTER *aloud*: I can't help it. *He raps*. Lord Dedham.

LORD DEDHAM: I've not yet had my facts—and I'm not the only one. Come now, Mr. Lightfoot, I'm not trying to bully you—but I want facts, and facts which I as well as Mr Arthur can grasp. How, for instance, does this affect my particular interest—the law?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *a little wearily*: Law . . . well, of course, your system of law ceases to exist.

LORD DEDHAM: Tch! tch! Come now, talk sense, young man, talk sense.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *ominously polite*: I am talking sense, Lord Dedham, deadly sense.

LORD DEDHAM *shortly*: I don't take it.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: It's quite simple. Your system of law relies at bottom on force. That's what, at long last, the policeman represents. Under the new conditions all displays of force are equally criminal, since one man can quite easily release enough force to destroy civilization.

LORD DEDHAM: To destroy . . . ?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Put it this way: when either party is equally able to destroy the other, there's stalemate. Arbitration follows.

LORD DEDHAM: Equally able . . . ?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: If you had listened to what Mr. Arthur said about this table, you would have understood. He said I could abolish it. By the use of one small piece of mechanism, constructed according to formulae of which only I am master, one man, any one man, can defy all the policemen in London.

LORD DEDHAM: What?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: All the policemen in the world.

LORD DEDHAM: How?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: He touches a spring; the atoms about the piece of mechanism begin to redistribute themselves at an undreamt-of-speed—at such a speed that not only he, but his house, his street, his borough, London itself, disappears, if he so wishes.

VOICES: Eh? Slower. Say that again.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I said, if he so wishes, London disappears; is blown up, if you like to put it that way—any explosion is only a sudden redistribution of atoms.

LORD DEDHAM: Come now . . . Tch! tch!

surely . . . But anyway, the man wouldn't be allowed that knowledge.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Why not? How can you prevent it? The same energy, released at a lower speed, will shortly be driving at a nominal cost every engine in the world.

LORD DEDHAM: Good God! *He sits back.* But —*But before he can begin again, Richard Stapp cries out.*

RICHARD STAPP: Oho! So that means . . . I say! I say! *His eyes light up.* Now we shall be able to talk to 'em, eh, Blount? England for ever!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I beg your pardon?

RICHARD STAPP: I said—well, no matter. Mr. Lightfoot, I'm extremely impressed. I'd esteem it a favor if you'd call on me at the War Office at ten sharp to-morrow morning. Thank you. *He fishes out an engagement book and scribbles in it.*

Francis Lightfoot stares at him.

LORD COSSINGTON: You s-said something about ch-changing one sub-ub-ubstance into another. Now, what r-r-raw materials does that affect—I mean, apart from Arthur's j-j-joke about the table?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Joke? Lord Cossington——

RICHARD STAPP *intervening*: One thing at a time. Ten to-morrow; make it sharp, will you? Thanks.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *to Richard Stapp*: I've not the slightest intention of wasting time in coming to see you. Your army doesn't exist. *He turns back to Lord Cossington.* Now . . .

RICHARD STAPP: What's that? Hey, you——

PRIME MINISTER: Lord Cossington's question, Stapp.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Mr. Arthur put it crudely, but I've already said that he was right. If I want to change this table into gold, I can.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Steady on. This question of raw materials——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *decisively*: All materials are henceforth raw materials.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Eh? But the Colonies——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: All colonies are henceforth Humanity. As sources of raw materials, they cease to exist.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: They cease to exist . . . they . . . is he mad or I?

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Mr. Lightfoot, this seems a very serious matter; worse, possibly, even than a war. You would advise an immediate moratorium for stabilization of credit, I suppose, eh?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Credit? Credit in units of what? Your system, which is founded on gold, has ceased to exist.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Rubbish. What about Labor?

H. G. DUNNE: Labor! Tell 'em, Lightfoot.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *laughing*: I suppose he'll say that's ceased to exist!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: As it is now, certainly. Mining, for instance.

LORD COSSINGTON: Look here, be s-serious; I'm a mine-owner.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Well, as a mine-owner——

ST. JOHN PASCOE: He has ceased to exist. Take notice, Cossington, you've ceased to exist. You're abolished! You're re-distributed!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: I say! I say! Stapp says——

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Look here, young man, I like you, but this joke has gone far enough. A farce is——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *fiery, jumping up*: Farce! Farce, gentlemen? It's you who are making the farce. Behave like adults; stop babbling like children about your departments. Wake up. All that stuff is totally and for ever scrapped. Put it out of your minds. Concentrate on something serious.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Serious? Where d'you suppose you an' your crazy experiments 'ud be, if it weren't for the Navy?

ST. JOHN PASCOE: You wouldn't exist—you wouldn't exist!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: I s'pose you'll tell us the Empire——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Empire? What Empire? I'm talking about Mankind.

LORD DEDHAM: D'you realize what you're saying?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Of course I do, and it's high time you——

EVELYN ARTHUR *jumping up*: It is indeed!

Tumult in which Lord Dedham can be heard bawling——

LORD DEDHAM: Traitor!

PRIME MINISTER *rapping with a heavy ruler*: Quiet! I will have quiet! This is a Cabinet Committee, not Bedlam! Silence, gentlemen! Silence! Silence! *He is evidently very angry.*

The tumult dies away.

Gentlemen, this is a disgraceful scene. Disgraceful. Mr. Arthur and I will thank you gentlemen to listen to him in silence.

EVELYN ARTHUR *suavely*: Gentlemen, in the heat of the moment I think we have tended, as Mr. Lightfoot suggests, to overlook the larger issues. Our amazement, concerned, honorably concerned, as we are, with those duties which the State has entrusted to us, is natural; but we have no time for amazement. Has it struck you, gentlemen, that Mr. Lightfoot is in a position to carry this news to other, and perhaps he would consider, more enlightened groups, either at home or abroad? I trust he will not do so; I do not think he will; possibly he already regrets imparting it even to us. But I ask Mr. Lightfoot to remember that these implications, which from long familiarity seem so much a matter of course to him,

are an extraordinary, a staggering novelty to us. The illimitable hopes so abruptly revealed are hard to grasp in a moment. But, Francis Lightfoot, those hopes are sublime; and our stupefaction is but the measure of their magnificence. We have done our duty in the past: we shall rise to it now. Soon the unfamiliar air of this exalted frontier will become native to us; and, inspired by *your* example, *your* achievement, your *trust*, we shall perform *our* task, the task which you have honored us by setting, and for which we thank you, not only in our names, but in the name of Humanity. *He holds out his hand.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *moved*: Thank you, Mr. Arthur. You have understood.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Not only I. Prime Minister, I call on you to ask this Cabinet Committee to rise in Mr. Lightfoot's honor.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *looking up, covering his eyes with his hands*: No, no, not in mine, *stretching up his arms*, in honor of the coming glory to Humanity.

Evelyn Arthur on one side, the Prime Minister on the other, signal with frantic but hidden gestures for the Cabinet Committee to rise.

The Committee takes the cue.

Francis Lightfoot, exulting, with his arms yet raised, looks round on them.

At this hour, the New World begins. *Pause. Francis Lightfoot lowers his arms*: Thank you, gentlemen. This day week, at the same time. Meanwhile, I undertake to say nothing to anyone else, and you undertake to draw up your program. *He pulls out a paper.* Here are details of time and place for the tests which I have arranged, for you and for any experts you like to bring. My assistants will carry them out; I shan't be there: demonstrations are so futile. However, though they are just simple tests, they will prove without revealing my method, that I can do what I say. Good day, gentlemen. *Amid complete and astonished silence he makes for the doors. At the doors he turns.* I have called on you to build a House for Man. To-day week will disclose whether you have risen to your opportunity. The responsibility is yours.

He goes out.

LORD DEDHAM *abruptly sitting down*: Well, I'll be—*There is silence: the members of the Committee avoid each other's eyes.* Why so mum? You were noisy enough just now! Telling Cossington his coal-mines didn't exist! Apparently nothing existed for that young fellow. Nerve, eh?

RICHARD STAPP *with sudden irritation*: Shut up, will you? I want to think.

LORD DEDHAM: Temper, Daredevil Dick! *Looking round, and placing one foot on the table.* What the hell's eating you, turned into undertakers or what?

RICHARD STAPP *ruminating*: We did not agree to formulate a program.

EVELYN ARTHUR *succinctly*: Exactly.

LORD DEDHAM *swinging round*: Arthur: I say, Arthur: what induced you to play that absurd comedy of paying honor to an infant gas-bag?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Still cross-examining, Dedham? I suggest that in future you pitch your key a little lower when addressing Mr. Lightfoot.

LORD DEDHAM: And why should I, Mister Philosopher?

EVELYN ARTHUR *amazed at last*: Why should you?

LORD DEDHAM: That's what I said. Why d'you stare at me like that? *He jumps up and makes towards Evelyn Arthur.* Drop that damned eye-glass. *Evelyn Arthur takes it out and advances upon Lord*

Dedham with a glacial casualness, then taps him on the chest with the monocle.

EVELYN ARTHUR: My friend, this is no time for schoolboy horse-play. *He raises his voice. The others look up and drift nearer.* Kindly realize that every word that young man said is—I am convinced—literally true.

LORD COSSINGTON: Oh, c-c-come, surely——

EVELYN ARTHUR *throwing the word over his shoulder*: Every word! And I solemnly say to you all, it would be better for that poor young man and for the world had he never been born.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *A week later.*

The Committee in session. Signs of strain, weariness, and jangled nerves.

PRIME MINISTER: So far, then, we are all agreed—except Mr. Stapp.

RICHARD STAPP: I merely refrained from votin': I don't oppose.

PRIME MINISTER: There remains: the method of putting our resolution into effect; and the report of the subsidiary experts. On that we needn't waste time; it merely confirms what we ourselves have seen, and what progress Charlton and Eldridge . . .

H. G. DUNNE *suddenly*: Damn Charlton and Eldridge!

RICHARD STAPP: Exactly. There we *are* agreed. Damn Charlton and Eldridge.

LORD DEDHAM *to Sir Humphrey Haliburton*: A walking tour, you said?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: A walking tour. In Switzerland—Switzerland!

LORD DEDHAM: Good God!

LORD COSSINGTON: Rather casual of them.

RICHARD STAPP: Casual, you wretched ass! It's criminal.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Stapp . . .

RICHARD STAPP: I beg your pardon, Prime Minister. I beg your pardon, Cossington.

LORD COSSINGTON: Not at all.

LORD DEDHAM *to Sir Humphrey Haliburton*: Look here, let me get this thing straight . . .

ESME FAULKINER: Oh, need we again?

RICHARD STAPP: Monday's hash.

PRIME MINISTER: If you *please*, Mr. Stapp.

RICHARD STAPP: Oh, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: The two greatest scientists in England—for the matter of that, in Europe—except, I suppose, this fellow Lightfoot—are asked by the British Government to submit a report on the most important thing that has ever happened. They attend the tests, seem quite unmoved, report that the—the impossible—

has been accomplished. "They don't know how"; and then, quietly disappear, vanish. . . .

ST. JOHN PASCOE: They've redistributed their atoms!

ESME FAULKINER: Oh, shut up!

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Faulkiner . . .

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: . . . and the only information we can get—at their homes, anywhere—is that they've "gone to Switzerland: on a walking tour."

LORD DEDHAM: I never heard such——

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: And the Swiss authorities can't trace 'em.

LORD DEDHAM: I don't like it: there's monkey-business somewhere.

LORD COSSINGTON: I don't understand.

EVELYN ARTHUR: None of us understand, Lord Cossington. We are merely—faced with facts.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Facts! Detonatin' that lump o' sugar an' leavin' a crater as big as St. Paul's——

LORD DEDHAM: And Sunny's latchkey—trans-

formed into gold—and then—under our very noses —becoming a lump of india rubber. . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen——

ESME FAULKINER: Those are nothing: that last thing——

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Don't speak of it!

H. G. DUNNE: Appalling!

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Blasphemous!

ST. JOHN PASCOE: And the Chinee turning the thing on as casually as . . .

MATTHEW GRINDLE: It isn't natural—it isn't right. . . .

H. G. DUNNE: I suppose I did see that, but sometimes it seems to be a nightmare—as if I'd dreamt——

LORD VIVIAN VERE: The devil it does! It haunts *me* like a living thing. Ever since, I've felt that all this is a dream and that the only reality.

LORD COSSINGTON: I'm what the hoi polloi call, I believe, "s-struck all of a 'eap." But, s-seriously, d'you know, I don't understand.

PRIME MINISTER: Shall we get on? Mr. Lightfoot has been waiting nearly two hours. *Murmurs of agreement.*

Our resolution has been passed. There remains the method of carrying that resolution into effect. Has anyone any suggestions?

EVELYN ARTHUR *rising*: Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Arthur.

EVELYN ARTHUR: It seems to me, or, rather, the first move seems to me—comparatively simple; we try to persuade him; we avoid, we carefully avoid, bullying. Not counting Mr. Stapp, who declares himself in abeyance, so to speak, there are twelve men in this room, adept in world-affairs, to deal with one boy, aged twenty-five. It does not sound difficult. *He sits down.*

VOICES: Hear, hear!

PRIME MINISTER: Why should it be? My nephew may be rather a queer young fish, but he's a nice boy and a gentleman. *Murmurs of agreement.*

PRIME MINISTER *to Evelyn Arthur*: You'll take charge of the conversation?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Oh dear, no! Let it . . . happen. I stress one point only: no bullying.

Murmurs of agreement.

PRIME MINISTER: Very well. Shall I send for him?

RICHARD STAPP: Just a moment, Prime Minister. *Rising.* Mr. Arthur spoke o' the first move. What about the second? *He sits down.*

Simultaneously:

LORD DEDHAM: Exactly.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Hear, hear!

PRIME MINISTER *puzzled*: I don't follow. . . .

EVELYN ARTHUR *to Richard Stapp*: Your supposed contingency is . . . ? Well?

RICHARD STAPP *rising*: Take it we don't persuade him . . . what then?

PRIME MINISTER: But we will.

RICHARD STAPP: Supposin' *he* won't. *He sits down.*

PRIME MINISTER: My nephew?

LORD DEDHAM *drily*: Mr. Lightfoot is then at liberty to proceed elsewhere? *He clears his throat loudly.*

PRIME MINISTER *looking from one to another*: Come now, you don't think that Francis . . . dear

dear! But surely that could very easily be prevented?

RICHARD STAPP: How? *A pause. Rising*:—I propose that we do not leave Mr. Lightfoot free to go anywhere. *He sits down.*

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Stapp!

LORD DEDHAM *rising*: I second that. *He sits down.*

H. G. DUNNE: I say! I say!

LORD COSSINGTON: How d'you mean—"Not free"?

EVELYN ARTHUR *with a hint of dry distaste*: They mean we arrest Francis.

Sensation.

Well?

PRIME MINISTER: But what for?

RICHARD STAPP: Dedham, I dare say, can find some sound legal ground.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Dedham, I dare say, can. Well?

RICHARD STAPP: Why, then we've got him.

EVELYN ARTHUR: To be sure. Well?

RICHARD STAPP: Well?

EVELYN ARTHUR: My interest in this young man's history deepens. Might one enquire when he comes out? But perhaps he falls into an unforeseen decline . . . has a stroke? Well?

RICHARD STAPP: Damn it, Arthur, do drop those "wells."

EVELYN ARTHUR *dulcetly*: Does he come out?

RICHARD STAPP: No!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Ah! . . .

PRIME MINISTER: But it's preposterous! Young Francis! You can't keep him shut up forever.

RICHARD STAPP: Why not? *Rising*: You all know my opinion: you'll never get him on the lines you're takin'. An', whether you do or don't, he's a walkin' bombshell till he's shut up, shut up tight, an' shut up for keeps. But you can't do that: people talk. If I had my way, d'you know what I'd do?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Something in the grand style.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Deceive, an' shoot him?

RICHARD STAPP: Exactly. *He sits down. Pause.*

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: H'm! Not so bad, either! *Pause.*

H. G. DUNNE: Some people have damned ugly minds.

PRIME MINISTER: Shoot Francis?

RICHARD STAPP: That's what I said, Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Goodness gracious!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Our Dick is always so decisive.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: You don't mean that, Stapp?

RICHARD STAPP: I do.

LORD COSSINGTON: I don't understand.

PRIME MINISTER: But what on earth—will anybody explain . . . ? Lord Dedham, surely you don't . . . ?

LORD DEDHAM: Shooting: no? The rest: certainly.

PRIME MINISTER: Upon my soul——

RICHARD STAPP: Question!

Divided murmurs.

H. G. DUNNE: Opinion seems against you, Stapp.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: I should damned well hope so. *Rising*: Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Lord Sunningdale.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *very jovially*: Now then, yer benevolent, bloodthirsty barbarians . . .

Laughter.

We're in London, not Moscow.

Murmurs of "Hear hear."

There's no need ter try an' pull all this Napoleon-Trotsky-Mussolini stuff. Damned unsportsmanlike, I call it: lockin' up an' murderin' an' poisonin' a nice young feller whose only fault is he's too full o' faith, hope an' charity. The lad's a good lad: mettlesome but gentle-mouthed. He's lookin' ter us: an', as Arthur says, if twelve of us old stagers can't put an idealistic colt through his paces on the snaffle—well, it's high time we took ter our beds an' halloaed for the parson. *He sits down.*

Applause and opposition.

H. G. DUNNE: Hear, hear! Take your fence when you come to it.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: H'm! Fear God but keep your powder dry. Prime Minister, I move that, if Mr. Lightfoot refuse, he be immediately arrested.

RICHARD STAPP: An' placed in strict confinement.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *to Richard Stapp*: Is that necessary?

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Stapp's afraid Lightfoot'll redistribute his atoms!

RICHARD STAPP *under his breath*: Blasted fool!

ST. JOHN PASCOE: I beg your pardon?

RICHARD STAPP: Nothin', nothin'! *To Sir Humphrey Haliburton*: You accept it?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Oh, all right. I take it all this is highly speculative . . .

RICHARD STAPP *to Lord Dedham*: You'll second?

LORD DEDHAM *to the Prime Minister*: Second the motion.

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen, really . . . I am utterly . . .

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *soothingly*: Merely provisional. We both detest extremes.

PRIME MINISTER: I don't like it. Arrest, perhaps: strict confinement, no. The *via media*, the golden mean . . . *looking round*: But, if I must . . . I shall put the motion. We will take a show of hands, please. Those in favor . . .

Certain hands go up, finally Evelyn Arthur's.

Dear me! Not you, Evelyn?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I, Walter.

Other hands go up.

PRIME MINISTER: Bless my soul . . . very odd . . . Those against . . . *counting*: Sunny, Dunne, myself, Cossington. The motion is carried. I regret it, profoundly. *Rousing himself*: Our order of proceedure, then, is: first, persuasion; if that should fail—I am convinced it will not—then the matter lies in Lord Dedham's hands. Is that correct?

Murmurs of assent.

Very well then. Mr. Dunne, will you——

EVELYN ARTHUR *intervening*: May I?—The young man is actuated by three main principles: desire for the progress of knowledge, the spirit of good will, and, pre-eminently, by pride. Do not forget that pride——

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen?

Murmurs of assent.

Mr. Dunne . . .

Dunne rises, presses a bell-push near the door, and sits down.

Pause.

A Messenger enters.

Ask Mr. Lightfoot to do us the honor.

The Messenger goes out.

Pause.

The Messenger shows in Francis Lightfoot.

The Messenger goes out, closing the door.

Silence.

Slowly, and in some cases reluctantly, The Committee rises.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Won't you—won't you please sit down?

They begin to sit down.

PRIME MINISTER: Sit down here, Francis.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I'd rather stand, thanks.

PRIME MINISTER: I'm sorry we had to keep you waiting.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Oh, I didn't mean that. That's nothing. *He sticks his hands in his pockets and concentrates on Evelyn Arthur.*

LORD SUNNINGDALE: We're still amazed, my boy; you've knocked us groggy.

H. G. DUNNE: Superb! Beyond genius!

LORD DEDHAM: It needs no oracle, young man, to——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes, yes; of course you're —don't think me rude, but . . . what I want to know is—what's your program?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Ah, precisely, the program.

Pause.

PRIME MINISTER *rising*: Fifteen minutes ago, this Committee passed a resolution, Francis—with no dissentient voice.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes?

PRIME MINISTER: One member did not vote.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *watchful*: You, uncle?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I am in favor of *that* resolution.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: You, Mr. Arthur?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I . . . proposed it.

H. G. DUNNE: And I seconded it.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Good. Good. Yes?

PRIME MINISTER: I will repeat it:

"His Majesty's Cabinet-Members, in Committee assembled, most earnestly and solemnly request and entreat Francis Lightfoot to communicate his overwhelming discovery to no other human being, and to destroy its secret."

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: What?

PRIME MINISTER: "And to destroy its secret."

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Destroy . . . destroy my—is—is it a joke?

PRIME MINISTER: No, my boy. *He sits down.*

Pause.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Never! Never, while there are stars in heaven or a man on earth.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Has it struck you, Francis, that, if you don't, there may soon be no man on earth, and, quite possibly, one less star in heaven?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: No. Humanity's not like that. It can't be: I know it can't: my heart tells me it can't.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Is that what you judge by in your laboratory? *Pause.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *at a loss*: So that's what you really . . . Thank God, I . . . *he closes his eyes.*

EVELYN ARTHUR *who has risen; crossing to Francis Lightfoot and offering his hand*: Good-bye, Francis. *Francis Lightfoot opens his eyes and stares at the hand.*

Need we part in anger?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Anger? I'm not angry. Only it's so unbelievable.

EVELYN ARTHUR *very kindly*: Nothing is unbelievable. Good-bye, Francis.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: But . . . good-bye? Have I done anything that——

EVELYN ARTHUR: Not in the least. Good-bye, my boy. *He shakes him by the hand, solemnly and gently.* I pray that you may use your *future* knowledge aright.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: What d'you mean?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Meanwhile—*impressively*—good-bye, and good luck. *He conducts Francis Lightfoot towards the door.* If there's any little point, I'm

on the telephone, remember. You can always apply to me—I shall be pleased to listen. Good-bye.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: So you want to be rid of me? The devil you do! I'll tell you something. You're jealous of your power—the power of the few over the many. You're scared I'll end it. Well, I will!

EVELYN ARTHUR: With the aid of—er—the many?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Those you despise—the man in the street!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Indeed? Under the banners of—er—Shelley and Clark Maxwell?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Dear me: a not inconsiderable undertaking. But, with Shelley and Clark Maxwell as guides, doubtless you and the—er—man in the street will make a neat job of it—*if* he has ever heard of either.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *scornfully*: If!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Ah! Faith has such advantages over experience.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: You don't believe he has?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I am . . . platonically curious.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Then I'll prove it to you.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Impossible. How?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I'll—I'll ask the first passers-by.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Who Shelley was? What Clark Maxwell did?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes! I'll teach you what's what, by God!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Dear Francis, I shall be glad to learn . . . How will you pick them?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I'll—I'll go and bring in the first three men I meet. *He turns to go.*

Sensation.

He stops. You come, too: then you'll see I'm being square.

EVELYN ARTHUR: After you.

Evelyn Arthur ushers Francis Lightfoot out.

Exit Francis Lightfoot.

Evelyn Arthur takes out his monocle, glances at the Committee, replaces his monocle, and:

Evelyn Arthur goes out.

The tension breaks.

RICHARD STAPP: Whe-ew!

ST. JOHN PASCOE: By God, that man should have been a K. C. Deliberate provocation.

ESME FAULKINER: I thought I'd pass out when he said good-bye: "Good-bye, Francis!"

LORD COSSINGTON: "If there's any little point you can apply to me"—yes, I *don't* think.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: And the bunny rolled head over heels into the net.

LORD DEDHAM: "Take charge o' the conversation? Oh dear no. Let it happen."

MATTHEW GRINDLE *gloomy*: We're not out of the wood, yet; and my Budget proposals . . .

RICHARD STAPP *pleased*: Damn 'em! Damn everythin'! This is life!

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Sssh!

PRIME MINISTER: Already?

The doors open. Francis Lightfoot and Evelyn Arthur come in.

EVELYN ARTHUR: We found two, just outside the front door, going in opposite directions. There

was no one else in sight, so—er—we agreed that—*to the Prime Minister*—you might ask your secretary to procure the third: would you mind?

PRIME MINISTER: Certainly. *Telephoning*: Grantly speaking: is that you, Eddie? Would you be so good as to go out on to the Downing Street steps and ask the first man you meet to come in here for a moment . . . yes, that's what I said. Wait a moment. Where are the two others?

EVELYN ARTHUR: In the front ante-room.

PRIME MINISTER *telephoning*: Put him in the front ante-room: you'll find two others there: then show them in here, one at a time. Don't scare him . . . oh, say we've a little bet on.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *laughing*: Every Englishman likes a bet. Gives him somethin' ter think about.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *anxious, to Evelyn Arthur*: I'd say the big chap was a plumber?

EVELYN ARTHUR *vaguely*: I haven't the remotest idea: but, then, I never have. All workmen seem the same to me: some smell of onions, some of beer. I prefer onions.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: The other's a clerk, I suppose.

EVELYN ARTHUR *dreamily*: A subsidiary ruler, and a subsidiary ruled. Yes, our business is with . . . what is. Once we lose touch with that, we're done for. *Change of tone.* Shall we sit down?

They sit.

Tell me, Francis, wasn't it held in Newton's day that the planets marched upon their orbits in accordance with the law of an imperious necessity, which imposed upon each its course?

Francis Lightfoot nods.

Dreamily again: And to-day it is agreed, I suppose, that the affair is hardly so exalted. The planets move upon their course according to the law of least resistance, casually, as it were; taking the easiest path. The easiest path. Not unlike humanity.

Evelyn Arthur checks Francis Lightfoot, who seems about to speak.

Despite all our talk about progress, the law would seem to be that humanity exerts, not its maximum, but its minimum energy, and progresses only when it is easier to progress than to retrogress or to stand still. *Change of tone.* Civilization cannot be imposed, Francis: it can only be induced: the art of government consists in making retrogression difficult, stagnation dull, and progress—apparently—easy.

The doors open.

Ah, here's our man. *Quickly to Francis Lightfoot*: Shelley or Clark Maxwell?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *similarly*: Shelley for a workingman: otherwise Clark Maxwell. Is that fair?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I . . . think so.

Mr. Albert Cummins appears in the doorway—a shambling, elderly laborer, who carries his cap in his hand and a bag of tools. He is accompanied by a Messenger, who points to the Prime Minister.

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: That *'im?*

The Messenger withdraws.

Mr. Albert Cummins stands, sheepish.

PRIME MINISTER: Come in, my man—we want to speak to you.

Mr. Albert Cummins advances uneasily.

Your name is . . . ?

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: Cummins, sir, Albert Cummins.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, Mr. Cummins, we've been having a little discussion and we wish to ask you a question—nothing important—just between

friends. Did you ever hear of a man called Shelley, Mr. Cummins?

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: Wot was 'e? Hadmiral, sir?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: Chapel?

PRIME MINISTER: Scarcely.

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: Ah, that's a pity: yer gotter find the Light o' the World—. Can't honestly say I 'ave, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you, Mr. Cummins. Good morning.

MR. ALBERT CUMMINS: Thank yer, sir. *As he goes*: This'll be a grand tale for my missus. . . . 'Is 'air ain't ser long as they said.

He goes out.

MATTHEW GRINDLE: That's the kind.

EVELYN ARTHUR *to Francis Lightfoot*: Well?

No answer.

Mr. Hart-Plimsoll, a young gentleman in a short morning coat, enters, carrying a despatch-case and a black felt hat. He is clearly very nervous. He stops short.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: The secretary said . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Pray come in. Excuse us troubling you, sir, but we . . . *he sees the despatch-case.* So, like ourselves, you're a public servant, eh, Mr. . . .?

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Hart-Plimsoll, sir. First Division Clerk in the F. O.—*remembering and seeing Evelyn Arthur*—Foreign Office.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Any objection, Francis? Apparently he is one of my myrmidons.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: That's all right.

PRIME MINISTER: We want to ask you a question.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Yes, sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Nothing to do with Foreign Affairs. A general question.

MR. HART-PRIMSOLL *more nervous than ever*: Yes, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Have you ever heard of a man called Clark Maxwell?

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Clark Maxwell . . . Clark Maxwell . . . um—scientist, wasn't he?

Had something to do with magnetism—or was it electric light?

PRIME MINISTER *gently*: *I*'m asking *you*.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL *uneasy*: I seem to remember something . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Yes?

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: But I can't remember what—science does seem awfully inhuman, don't-you-know, and I do like human beings.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Ah, the human comedy, eh? What do you consider—roughly—the most important things? Don't hurry.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Well, taking life in the large, sir, I should say the two most important things in life are love and Anglo-American relations.

PRIME MINISTER *tickled*: Capital! *Laughter*.

EVELYN ARTHUR: I observe you separate the two.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Oh, no, sir.

EVELYN ARTHUR: No?

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL *laughing sheepishly*: Well, as a matter of fact, they go together in my case—in every sense.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Do they? Say there was a second secretaryship in Washington, would you . . .?

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Would I!—I mean, yes, sir.

EVELYN ARTHUR: H'm! I'll give you a tip: a diplomat should never look surprised, unless it's his game. That tip is worth more than a second secretaryship. Good morning.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL *dejectedly*: Good morning, sir. *He turns to go.*

PRIME MINISTER: Please send in the man who's waiting. Thank you very much.

MR. HART-PLIMSOLL: Thank you, sir.

He goes.

PRIME MINISTER *to Evelyn Arthur*: Cruel Evelyn!

EVELYN ARTHUR *covertly watching Francis Lightfoot*: Must teach 'em. And he'll get that second secretaryship. *Glancing toward the door*: Hel-lo. *Mr. Taggert, a red-headed little man of about thirty-five, stands in the door. He wears a check overcoat, too big for him, a red tie, and a felt hat.*

MR. TAGGERT *on the offensive-defensive*: So yer sent fer me—eh?

PRIME MINISTER *sizing him up*: Yes. My colleagues and I wish to ask you a question, if we may. Nothing important.

MR. TAGGERT: That's all very well, but you're a ring o' Capitalist bosses, an' I'm a Socialist.

PRIME MINISTER *mildly*: When I, as Prime Minister, want to ask a Socialist a question, I ask the Leader of the Opposition. Now I'm only one man addressing another, Mr. . . .?

MR. TAGGERT: My name's Taggert. T, A, double G, E, R, T.

PRIME MINISTER: The question we want to ask you, Mr. Taggert, is this: did you ever hear of a man called Shelley?

MR. TAGGERT: Shelley? Livin'?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

MR. TAGGERT: H'm. Shelley. Let . . . me . . . see . . . Revolutionary poet, wasn't he?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Ah!

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

MR. TAGGERT: That's about all I know. Not strong on poetry. Give me fax—Marx is my line. That's a real revolutionary.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *genially*: By real, you mean addicted to the use of bombs, eh?

MR. TAGGERT *on his subject*: Marx is deep 'Ssfar as I understand 'm, 'e don't suggest bombs. All 'e says is, that when things is as they is, bombs will 'appen. But you're supposed ter be eddicated—you should know w'ether 'e says bombs or no. Wot wi' the crying o' the baby, an' me leavin' school ser young an' 'avin' been brought up on tin foods an' bein' a man of only sharpish parts at best, I really couldn't say, not fer certain. Maybe bombs would be a good argiment.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *genially*: A moving one, anyway.

MR. TAGGERT: Too movin' p'r'aps—an' I don't say that 'cos you're you an' I'm me. *Confidentially*. You know 'ow it is—lately I come ter feel it ain't as simple as all that—nothin' is. You asked me a 'ard, 'ard question, an' I don't rightly know 'ow ter answer it: but by an' large I should say wot this country needs is eddication, an' more eddication, an' more eddication still, an' not Latin an' Greek neither—an' not only outside this room.

Laughter.

PRIME MINISTER: Excellent! Perhaps, if you will leave your address, Lord Vivian here, the Presi-

dent of the Board of Education . . . Lord Vivian Vere, Mr. Taggert.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: How do you do?

MR. TAGGERT: Same ter you.

PRIME MINISTER: Lord Vivian may be able to assist you toward pursuing your studies.

MR. TAGGERT: Nothin' doin'! I don't want ter owe nothin' ter nobody. I'm class-conscious, I am.

PRIME MINISTER: Alas!

LORD VIVIAN VERE: We have our Adult Education Bill.

MR. TAGGERT: Milk fer bibes! We knows yer.

PRIME MINISTER *soothingly*: We do our best. And what we have heard from you to-day, Mr. Taggert, and our appreciation of your character and independence, will encourage us to do better. Good morning, Mr. Taggert.

MR. TAGGERT: Good day ter *you. He makes to depart. He halts.* Cor! If that ain't ole Sunny—Lord Sunningdale, I mean. *To the rest*: 'Scuse me a minute. *He takes off his hat and leans across the table.* Knew yer by yer carnation m'lord. One good turn deserves another, as the sayin' is. May I ask yer somethin'?

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Certainly, Mr. Taggert.

MR. TAGGERT: Well—I won't let on outside—but I *would* like ter know, is that li'l 'oss 'o yours goin' ter win termorrow?

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Things, Mr. Taggert, as you yourself have observed, are not so simple as they seem. I think my horse will win, but . . . I've hedged my bets.

MR. TAGGERT: Thank yer, comrade.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: When it comes to sport, we're all comrades, I hope.

MR. TAGGERT: Sport's sport, anywhere. Ser long.

The door closes behind him.

Exit Taggert.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Damme, I like that chap.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Well, Francis?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Well?

EVELYN ARTHUR: They were not . . . intimately acquainted with your two friends.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: No. But . . .

EVELYN ARTHUR *easily*: We are the representatives of millions such; we are no better, no worse; certainly luckier, possibly more knowledgable; but representative. We . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I've got it! Not knowledge! There's something more important. And they all had it. Goodwill!—That's right, smile! I wouldn't have your heart for—you're the mummy whose hand kills!

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Easy, boy, easy.

PRIME MINISTER: Francis! To my oldest friend——

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I don't care; he shall not sit there, gentle, courteous, pitying. I know him —history knows him—Antichrist! What can you know of Humanity, if you don't love it?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I beg your pardon for smiling, Francis. But—how can you love humanity, if you don't know it?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I trust it, and love begins with trust.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Are you quite sure love doesn't begin with . . . forgiveness?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Never! Despair always says that. There's the body of common goodwill.

Pause.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Young man: you said you went to a Public School?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: And you ran away?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Why? Was it because o' the body o' common goodwill? If it's so general, why am I at this table? Why's Lord Dedham, Sir Humphrey Haliburton, Esme Faulkiner, Richard Stapp?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Because you don't trust, or hope, or believe.

EVELYN ARTHUR: We trust as we dare, Francis; we hope as we may; we believe as we can.

LORD DEDHAM *harshly*: Government's not here to trust or hope or believe. We're here to govern.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *rising*: You're here to believe and, by God, I'll make you!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT *half rising*: You'll make . . .?

EVELYN ARTHUR *quietly*: Francis, do you believe?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *standing*: Yes, absolutely.

EVELYN ARTHUR *very gently*: Poor boy! *Pause.*

PRIME MINISTER: Francis, you spoke of the body of common goodwill. You were right. It exists, and all government is founded on it. But it takes many forms; and some of them issue in abnegation. In the splendor of youth we sometimes despise abnegation, but old hearts understand it, and prize it more every year. To you, we may seem ignoble in our disillusion; but I know, and all here know, if we know nothing else, that we have to die for Man before we can live for him; so that our death may increase the honor and might of the only god left living, that unknown god whom, as the Scripture says, "we ignorantly worship."

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Whose name is Compromise!

PRIME MINISTER: It is the gods who are most abused who survive. My boy, you are not the first to suffer: the highest heroism begins with just such abnegation: and there is probably not one man in this room who has not laid down some ideal on the altar of the common goodwill.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: What ideal has a fellow like Sir Romilly Blount ever sacrificed?

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: You're addressin' me, young man? *He rises.* Did you ever hear o' the Minotaur class o' battleship?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: No.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Then I'll tell you. The keels o' the Minotaur class were on the slips. They'd 'a' been the handsomest, the grandest ships ever known. What your physics is to you, those ships were to me. I foresaw 'em, I planned 'em, I toiled for 'em, I fought for 'em; an', when somebody I loved died, I prayed for 'em, knowin' as they alone could keep my heart from breakin' in my body. An' then, at this table, sittin' where I am now, I had to listen to these new disarmament proposals, an' the general feelin' was—they had to go. You may think it funny, young man, you may sneer at me, but every night for three nights I had to wrestle in prayer to be delivered from the temptation to speak up for my ships; I had to take the part of a Christ I didn't believe in, against the part of a Jehovah, god of battles, in whom I did. An' I came back, an' I sat down here, an' I never said a word; an', when they'd voted 'em away, I fell with my head on this table, as Esme Faulkiner here can tell you, an' your uncle—he was at the Home Office then—came an' patted me on

the back an' led me home. An' I never come into this room but I see the ghosts o' those ships before me floatin' above this table. You're young, my boy, an' you think you know a lot, but an old salt like me can tell you there's bitterer waters swallowed in this room than can be found in all the seven seas.

Silence.

Sir Romilly Blount sits down.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I beg your pardon, sir. *Change of voice.* Just the same, if *he* can live up to that ideal, surely the world . . .

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Damn it, boy, the mass of mankind is still unimaginably ignorant. One must do what one can.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Rubbish! One must do what one can't. That's why I tackled the atom.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: We're not all geniuses. And the man of to-day who's not quite ignorant has lost his old beliefs without acquiring new ones. A man without belief won't take responsibility, and it's responsibility you're trying to thrust on him. Besides, in even the best there's the residuum of the savage. Teach it no new ways to evil.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: All knowledge is always knowledge of good and evil.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *genially*: Life's a penny-i'-the-slot machine, my boy. Put in happiness, and you get out happiness; put in discontent, and you get discontent out. Everybody's got his limit and is happy or unhappy up to it. Let folks be comfortable their own way.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Comfortable!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Yes, my boy, comfortable. Live and let live.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Such living is death.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Well, Nature's for it—breeds 'em by the million.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *even more genially*: Why this itch ter make folks better, sonny? You fellers'll never admit a pippin's juicy, if it ain't off yer own tree. Damme, a blood-horse, all fire an' satin skin, is as satisfyin' as—as any highbrow kafoozelum. You brainy birds are all bilious bodies. Everythin' that's good of its kind is all right, an' failures are only stuff that's tryin' to be itself an' ain't succeedin'.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: It's because I want them to succeed . . .

LORD SUNNINGDALE: An' if they did, my son, they wouldn't have the qualities that's theirs.

Applause.

MATTHEW GRINDLE: These are temporal things: I deal in eternal. The universe is a phantasmal flux: our task is to redeem it to a temporary concreteness. Don't make that task easy: in its terror lies the sole dignity of a race of phantoms.

PRIME MINISTER: You have required us to build a House for Man: a wrong analogy. We politicians are not architects. Our task is more homely —that of a gardener. We seek only to fertilize, to sow, to prune: the rest depends on . . . the qualities of the plant. And let me draw your attention to this fact: half a gardener's work is done upon his knees.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *harshly*: Where you ought to be, young man. Like too many in this modern world—like most of my colleagues—you're a pagan. My doctrine is very old-fashioned. It begins with God's Will and ends with His Grace. And he who has Grace, and lives by and for it, needs nothing this world can give, for Grace is opportunity enough, since, however hard the worldly lot, the path of Grace leads to the throne of God.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Then what are you doing here?

MATTHEW GRINDLE: In all humility: bringing God into the Cabinet. *Pause.*

LORD COSSINGTON: I object on higher grounds-s. You're up-s-setting the balans-s of Nature. There's-s no progress without s-struggle, unceas-sing s-struggle.

Suppressed titters.

RICHARD STAPP: I called Lord Cossington a fool just now: so he is—a damned fool: but, for once, he's talkin' sense. Life *is* strife; what's more, strife's life.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I suppose you mean—the battlefield!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: An' I s'p'ose *you* think a man's a fool an' a knave, when he fights for his country?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I'm fighting for mine now.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Cloudcuckooland!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes: cloudcuckooland: a world of light and wings!

ESME FAULKINER: A world of light and wings: I've fought in it . . . Sopwith vs. Fokker . . . Lightfoot, I believe that, if in this life we strive hard enough, we shall live again. You want to make the world safe for democracy—a cushy place. I want for Man the immortality of heroes.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: The murder of the first-born!

Murmurs.

RICHARD STAPP: Listen to me, Francis Lightfoot. If you'd been a fightin' soldier in March 'eighteen, when the Germans rolled over us, you'd understand. I went out on a lone reconnaissance an' got so beat to the wide I went to sleep in a shell-hole. I woke up to find the German barrage droppin' behind me, our fellers gone, an' the Germans advancin'. I came on a machine-gun post with yesterday's dead round it, an' it struck me I could either surrender or stand. I stood. An' d'you know why? For my country? Rats! For immortality, the dignity o' the human race, like Esme Faulkiner here? Be damned! Shall I tell you? I did it for the satisfaction of my soul. Yes, that's why. An' d'you know what I owe that determination to? Classic tags at Harrow an' Cambridge. You think I've been against you, don't you? Well, you're wrong: I'm the feller who didn't vote on this resolution. I've fought these chaps for the last two days an' nights—the only one among 'em who cursed their "Safety First." Why? Because the battle's to the strong: an' with this weapon the Americans an' ourselves could be cock o' the walk an' teach all other peoples on the globe where they got off.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *with fascinated loathing*: And . . . when you'd won?

RICHARD STAPP: We shouldn't. Civilization would have had to begin again. But we'd have realized ourselves in tryin'. An' those moments o' realization are the only everlastin' present, the classical idea, the flower o' life, the game for the game's sake.

Pause.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Sooner or later, another civilization would rediscover the secret. And, when *that* civilization had won, what *then*?

RICHARD STAPP: The age o' milk and water. A sort o' Shaw-Wells Utopia. A soda-pop paradise, Y. M. C. A. owned. They put it to me that we *might* win—an' that's what stopped me. Now, d'you understand?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes, I understand: coward!

RICHARD STAPP: Eh?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Coward! And not only you. *He rises.* All of you! Cowards! Maybe you've courage to die: but not one of you've courage to live. *Angry murmurs.*

PRIME MINISTER: Francis! The fact that your ideas and ours do not chime . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Ideas! The very substance of our beings doesn't chime. Yours is the Spirit of Yesterday: mine is the Spirit of To-morrow.

Murmurs.

Must I tell you what every Board-school urchin knows?—that, among the myriad orbs of the Milky Way there gyrates, in a minor solar system, a negligible planet, and that on this pea of a planet creeps a race of parasites? But parasites who know themselves for what they are! Isolated! Isolated between the abyss of the unimaginably small, the atom, and the abyss of the unimaginably great, the night about us. In that isolation, what refuge have we but one another? what future but the future of all? what ethic but the good—not of one person, or of one nation—but of Mankind? Answer me that; you can't! The day of the Takers is over, I tell you; the day of the Givers dawns. And I inaugurate it—with the greatest of all possible gifts: mastery over matter. At last, Man is free to enlarge the Kingdom of the Spirit; and so, whether the Sum of Things is justified or not, to justify himself. And do you think, because the Spirit of Yesterday in *you* is afraid, the Spirit of To-morrow in *me* will run away?

Pause.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Then . . . you refuse to destroy the secret?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Utterly!

PRIME MINISTER: Francis!

Silence.

I beg you.

Silence.

We have been very patient. *He looks toward Lord Dedham.*

H. G. DUNNE *intervening*: One moment. Lightfoot, I'm not a politician: I'm an engineer; your uncle told you. Yes, and what's more, I'm one of your "Board-school urchins." *Glancing about the Cabinet.* I came from the gutter. Well, I planned a great scheme—perhaps you heard of it—the hydro-electrification of the Balkans?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *interested*: Yes. *He sits down.*

H. G. DUNNE: My object was peace in the Balkans, by giving them prosperity. I was on the eve of carrying the thing out—when pressure was put on me—this government, that government, all over Europe—yes, and Asia, and America, too—but, above all, *this* government. I told 'em what you've told 'em—the Spirit of To-morrow, Hope, Courage—against their vicious circle of sophistry and despair. And, in the end, I left 'em talking; and I went

ahead. In three weeks an international crisis had developed, which, if I hadn't given way, would have led to another war and wrecked civilization. That taught me my lesson. They asked me here—I was useful—to join the Cabinet. And I've been useful! The Dunne Internal Transportation Scheme—you know. Take my advice, Lightfoot, they know better than you or me the nature of the medium they work in.

Pause.

PRIME MINISTER: I have the concurrence of my colleagues, Francis, in saying that, if you will—er—grant our request, we will put every possible facility for research at your disposal.

Cries of "Hear, hear."

Your sphere of usefulness—to humanity—will be incalculable. And our facilities are only equalled by our—er—resources.

Applause.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *with a queer laugh*: You're trying to bribe me? *Me*—the master of the atom. How—how frightfully funny!

Angry murmurs.

PRIME MINISTER: Francis!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *suddenly serious: he pushes his chair back, and rises*: To hell with the lot of you. *He starts to go.*

LORD DEDHAM: Mr. Lightfoot, I advise you not to leave this room.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Ho-ho! This begins to be interesting. First you cajole; then, you bribe; now, you threaten.

LORD DEDHAM: I don't know what you're talking about. I am merely warning you.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Warning. I see: not threatening, warning. Why b-bother about p-procedure, Lord Dedham? Which is it to be: p-penal servitude, or the b-black cap?

PRIME MINISTER: Francis! We have no desire to proceed . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: "To extreme measures; but, none the less, with all the respect in the world" —I know it by heart before you say it.

LORD DEDHAM: You have displayed an unparalleled obstinacy. Civilization has the right to protect itself against such enemies as you. If you force us to choose between your good and the world's good . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: "We shall know how to choose." Where's your wig, man, where's your wig?

LORD DEDHAM: Levity will not aid you.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: "Levity!" Dedham on levity: to the Lord of the Atom! *Cocking his head.* I wonder which is the uglier, you or Blount. Snout for snout. God, I do hate ugly men!

PRIME MINISTER: Francis, I'm ashamed of you. Submit with grace.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Don't be ridiculous, uncle; d'you suppose I take Dedham seriously?

LORD DEDHAM: Mr. Haliburton, would you be kind enough to ring for Inspector Forster.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton rises.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Just a moment. *Pause.*

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Ah, the h-hesitating Mr. Arthur. From d-delicacy?

EVELYN ARTHUR *with all his charm, offering both hands*: Francis, for my sake . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *quietly*: Mr. Arthur, all along I have felt you to be wicked. Now I know it.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Wicked? Perhaps.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I suppose you think the Master of the Atom is as bankrupt as you are. *Looking round.* And you're all in it. Genuinely wicked.

LORD DEDHAM: Ring the bell, Haliburton.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes! L-lean on the b-bell—push; s-start every bell in Europe.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton again moves toward the bell.

Evelyn Arthur again stops Sir Humphrey Haliburton, with a gesture.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Francis! we know the game —and that one must have the courage even for that. But . . .

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: The game! So that's your secret; the secret of all your hearts. You *all* think it's a game—it's your way of evading responsibility. Very well then, if it's a game, let's play it. By God, if there's to be world-drama here, I'll play Cæsar. When I first took my place among you, by right, as the greatest benefactor Mankind has ever known, the first word my uncle spoke was "War." And since then: "War, Death, Despair"—to me who bring Love, Life, and Hope. Only one man among the lot of you wanted my gift—and what for? Humanity? No. To be "cock of the walk . . . the game

for the game's sake." You've dragged me down —you've made me fight—very well then, by God, I'll meet you on your own atrocious level. Dedham, you death's head, summon your policeman. *He shoves his hands into his pockets and sits down.*

LORD DEDHAM *unimpressed*: Mr. Haliburton.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton again goes toward the bell.

PRIME MINISTER *to Francis Lightfoot*: You understand what this means, Francis?

Sir Humphrey Haliburton stops.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: B-better than you, perhaps.

LORD DEDHAM: Don't get the idea that you'll make speeches in the dock; you'll never reach it; I'll see to that.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: In-f-flexible D-Dedham!

LORD DEDHAM: Still funny, eh? Young man, you see that sunlight? Look well at it, for you're not likely to see it again.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *with the nasal laugh of Mr. Punch*: Ha-ha! the blood and thunder touch at last! I was afraid we weren't going to have it.

PRIME MINISTER: Francis, have you taken leave of . . .?

LORD DEDHAM: Haliburton, ring that bell.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton is about to do so.

Matthew Grindle, with whom Evelyn Arthur has been conferring, whispers urgently to him.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton stops.

Go on, Haliburton; ring.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton reaches for the bell.

EVELYN ARTHUR: One moment.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton stops.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Such h-hesitation, M-mister Arthur, almost amounts to d-dilatoriness.

Uproar.

EVELYN ARTHUR *sharply*: Prime Minister, I ask for silence, please.

Silence falls.

To Francis Lightfoot: Just now, you informed us that we were bankrupt and you were not. May I ask to what currency you referred?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Your own! What else is valid here?

EVELYN ARTHUR: I am sorry you should think so. You are not Prometheus, after all; you are only another technician who has lost his temper. *He sits down disdainfully.* Ring down the curtain, Hal, on another dismal comedy.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton again reaches for the bell.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Stop!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Why should we stop? Those who cannot rise must sink.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Stop, I say!

EVELYN ARTHUR: Gentlemen, Olympians must be patient. *To Francis Lightfoot.* You have an announcement to make? Make it, if you have the courage.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Have you the courage to hear?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Not Prometheus, only his understudy.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: His understudy, eh? *To the rest.* Listen, you. Last week, I came here—a boy, full of hope: to-day I stand here—a man, whose despair almost equals your own. But one learns in this room. Last week, when I left here, my heart knew—though my brain refused to believe—your wickedness. And I made my preparations.

VOICES: What's he mean? What's he talking about?—"Preparations?"

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: My preparations! Aren't I to be shot at dawn? or buried alive? Understand this: either, by *noon* to-morrow, you will be prepared to formulate, under my supervision, a constructive program satisfactory to *me*, or at *one o'clock to-morrow* England ends.

Uproar.

Where this island was, will be a whirlpool of disintegrating atoms. *He turns to go.*

VOICES: Stop him! He's mad! Arrest him!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *dominating them*: If—if I am interfered with in the slightest degree, or if, in the meantime. *Quietly.* I should come to an unlooked-for—and convenient—end, no power at present known to man, can avert that catastrophe. *Smiling*: That accident will guarantee the detonation.

PRIME MINISTER: Can you do that?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I can.

PRIME MINISTER: Will you do that?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I will. Good morning, gentlemen.

ESME FAULKINER: How?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: That's my affair. But I assure you that, with this brain, these hands, I can destroy England, Europe, the entire planet—to-day, to-morrow, at any moment.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: What d'yer mean? A bomb?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Nature is not as simple as you, First Lord; nor, I may add, am I.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Damned puppy!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Besides, most of all, when they're sentimental, I don't like men with warts on their noses.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT *going for him*: You'll pay for that, you little . . .

Evelyn Arthur, Richard Stapp and others hold him back.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *to Evelyn Arthur*: So the understudy *can* talk to the Olympians? Clever of you to remember, *blowing across the palm of his hand*, that, if he blows, you—vanish.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: I don't believe you.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: You don't, don't you? Dear, dear. If you don't believe me, *he takes out his watch—a large Hunter—opens and looks at it*, by

noon to-morrow . . . *Closes the watch with a click.* Good day. *Again he starts to go.*

EVELYN ARTHUR *between him and the door*: In all sincerity, don't be so hard. Forgive Man for being what he is.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: My hardness will make Man what he might be.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Have pity.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Where your pity ends, my love begins.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Your pride!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: My love's pride.

EVELYN ARTHUR: My boy, you don't know what love is. If you did, you would know right and wrong.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *hesitating*: Right and wrong? *Proudly.* Your right and wrong are Yesterday's; mine are To-morrow's.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Then you will crucify Man on the cross of your impossible hopes?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I will raise Man, though it be upon a cross, and crown him, though it be with thorns.

Francis Lightfoot goes out.

RICHARD STAPP: Quick, Hal—your men—after him—watch him, every moment; don't let him know they're following him, and, for God's sake, *tell them not to touch him.*

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *The next day.*

The Committee assembled. Profound depression on every face save Evelyn Arthur's, which is calm and stern. Silence.

A Messenger enters.

MESSENGER: Mr. Lightfoot is here, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Already! Ask him to come in.

Exit Messenger.

Eleven-forty. He's early. Gentlemen, I never thought I should live to despair, yet I despair now. We have done our best; may God have mercy on us and all men. . . . And on this tyrant who knows not what he does.

The Messenger opens the door.

Silence.

Francis Lightfoot enters. A very different person from the young man who assumed the green tie; his dress is untidy, his hair not brushed, his face haggard; he drags his legs like a man who has tramped far; he appears crushed. He holds the volume of Shelley. He

makes his way to one of the pillars and leans against it like a weary Samson.

The Messenger goes out, closing the door.

Silence.

PRIME MINISTER *continuing*: You are early.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes.

Silence.

PRIME MINISTER: Our answer is brief: with one dissentient—*he glances at Evelyn Arthur*—we capitulate.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *wearily*: You capitulate?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes; we are beaten.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *without raising his head; stilly*: No, gentlemen, *I* am beaten. . . . I capitulate.

PRIME MINISTER: What?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I capitulate.

Silence.

PRIME MINISTER: So . . . you will destroy the secret?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *absently*: Something Evelyn Arthur said has entered my heart and, as far as this world is concerned, has broken it. He told me I had no knowledge of right and wrong. *To the Prime Minister*: What did you say? "Destroy the secret?" *With wearied and subdued scorn*: How can it be destroyed? Have I the right to wrong the Mind of Man and destroy it? Where action is, Right and Wrong are; and both are implacable. And, if I did destroy it, what use would that be? Hundreds of men are working on this thing. What has been surrendered to genius may be granted to labor. At this very moment, while the world, in you—*his unconscious gesture includes the audience*—its representatives—listens, somewhere on the globe a group of men may be bent over a paper which contains the solution. And, when that solution is once more found, the decision between Right and Wrong *must* be taken. But how can it be taken when I, the furtherest reach of Man's Mind, cannot take it? *Bitterly*: I, the furthest Reach! *Quietly and sadly, as stating a fact*: Man has not yet sufficiently evolved to face life, nor I to decide whether I have the right to force Man to face it.

EVELYN ARTHUR *profoundly stirred*: Then you despair—and out of that despair springs humility, and out of humility that modicum of modest hope

which alone is useful to man. *Softly, affectionately, but with firmness*: Faith, dear Francis, is only the shadow, not the substance of things hoped for. The House of Man is not to be built upon the quicksands of hope—they will only engulf him and his. Build, as I do, upon the rock of despair. It is a process, harder, less romantic, so slow that time itself hardly notices the accretions. Thus to build, demands patience and tenacity, and, above all, courage. But on these foundations the House of Man, however humble, can endure.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *raising his head, almost radiant*: You speak of hope and humility, of time and courage. *With mysterious exaltation*: I, too, have hope, but my hope is wider than yours, for it is not personal; my humility is deeper than yours, for it was born of the contemplation of night and the stars; my trust in time is stronger than yours, my courage stouter, for it is *Nature's* own. *Drawing himself up*: Now I am dangerous, for I am with Her: I am her Sibyl and I speak from the recesses of *her* heart. *Ominously*: Do you not even now feel her gather her forces? Man will be delivered from his burden.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Francis!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Yes, Evelyn Arthur?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Yes . . . you are . . . an angel; with an angel's pride.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *nodding gravely*: Not I, but She. And, as I have some shadow of her capacity, so I have some fragment of her courage. You have guessed; I thought you might. *To the others, strangely, as if pronouncing an elegy*: Gentlemen, there was a planet called the Earth. After inconceivable millennia, sentience emerged from that planet's slime. Again aeons passed, and unimaginable agonies, and at last that sentience, which was now none other than the Mind of Man—of you, gentlemen, and of me—earned the right to such an intensity of apprehension that it seemed on the brink of unriddling the profoundest enigma of the universe; with that unriddling, the universe would have become conscious of itself. Suddenly, every dream was shattered, not by a sidereal accident, but by the very constitution of Man himself. But the genius of Nature is inexhaustible: on another star that consciousness will be accomplished, and, to hasten that process and to assist Nature correct one of her casual blunders I, who gave Man his opportunity, am about to take it away. In a brief moment, this planet and all upon it, with all its history, its hopes, and its disillusions, will be wiped out.

Sensation.

You see that clock? When the two arms of that clock coincide on noon, I will return to stand among you, a man among his fellows, and with you pass away, even as all men and this very globe itself will pass away. Our midget has spun long enough. I give it fifteen minutes more—fifteen minutes for you to come to terms with your gods.

LORD DEDHAM: He's raving!

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: I have cause enough to rave; the fear in your face supplies it.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Haven't you any thought, man, for your own life, if not for ours?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Day by day, for years, I have faced death in my laboratory.

Several start to speak at once.

EVELYN ARTHUR *bitterly*: Let him alone. He has forgotten Right and Wrong.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: Right and Wrong? Man's inventions. Just as Man is Nature's invention. And Nature has had enough of all such inventions.

He turns to go. He opens the door.

PRIME MINISTER: Where are you going?

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: To look at the narcissi in the Park. *He picks up the book and looks at the*

clock. In fourteen minutes I shall return to die among my friends: Man, the enemy.

Exit Francis Lightfoot.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Good God!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: He doesn't in the least mind obliterating the entire earth, but he hates to be parted from his blasted rhyme book. Well, I'll be—*words fail him.*

ST. JOHN PASCOE: You're damned cool, Arthur, blast you; damned cool!

EVELYN ARTHUR *wearily*: I utterly fail to see how it will help to be anything else. There has been one Ice Age; this young man is merely saving us the trouble of waiting for another. *He sits down and pulls out a book from his pocket.*

ST. JOHN PASCOE *going over*: But I say——

EVELYN ARTHUR: Go away.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: But Arthur, Arthur, you surely don't mean——?

EVELYN ARTHUR *dryly*: I usually mean what I say. Please go away. I see I have one chapter left, and I hope to have time to finish it.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *pushing up the book to see the*

Title: Benedetto Croce! Philosophy! In the face of the futility of everything.

EVELYN ARTHUR *with patient irony*: And what else is philosophy for, if not to reconcile us to that futility? *He screws in his monocle and begins to read.*

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Gods! You're inhuman! I say—Arthur's being inhuman—says he really thinks—but that fellow can't—I mean—it's—don't laugh, you fellows—*they are not laughing*—but—but it's ludicrous, I mean—here we are and—I say, listen—do listen! My God, look at 'em all looking at the door—*raises his voice.* I say! What's the matter with 'em? *St. John Pascoe comes up to Sir Humphrey Haliburton and pulls him by the arm. No result. As to a deaf man*: Look here—My God—I say, d'you understand what I'm saying? Arthur says that fellow means it—that he'll blow the—blow the—but it's absurd—blow the——

St. John Pascoe pulls Sir Humphrey Haliburton's arm again.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton shakes him off.

St. John Pascoe pulls desperately at his sleeve and begins again, as though he were reciting a set speech he had memorized: Look here—look here—I say, d'you understand what I'm saying? Arthur says that

fellow means it—that he'll blow the—blow the—but it's absurd—blow the——

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: When you've quite finished babbling, will you kindly leave go of my sleeve and let me sit down? He *sits down absently*. I must think—I must think . . .

The Prime Minister peers at the clock short-sightedly, then goes to the window, where he stares out into the garden, watching.

The others cease staring at the door and drift away into various positions; some sit down in chairs, others prop themselves on the edge of the table or against the pillars.

Lord Cossington goes to the window, waggles the curtain, and then stands regarding it listlessly.

LORD COSSINGTON *dully*: I say, there's a policeman out there. Why do they always carry their macs. rolled up that way?

No answer.

I say . . .

MATTHEW GRINDLE: What?

LORD COSSINGTON: Nothing. I thought—nothing.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *testily*: If you've nothing to say, don't say it.

LORD COSSINGTON: But I have . . . I know what I thought . . . I didn't think the end of the world would be like this . . .

H. G. DUNNE: Didn't you? Well . . . it is.

Pause.

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Tch!

LORD COSSINGTON: Twelve minutes to twelve.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: We know that.

Several sighs.

LORD DEDHAM: Can't you fellows do anything but sigh? Like a lot of plunging sea-lions!

RICHARD STAPP *hitting the table*: We must DO something!

LORD SUNNINGDALE: I was waitin' for that. Come on, Stapp, bang the table, strike an attitude, blow out yer chest. Short o' breath? Gettin' fat, Daredevil Dick, gettin' fat!

RICHARD STAPP *off his guard*: What the hell——?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *getting up heavily*: Yes, we must do something. WHAT?

LORD SUNNINGDALE *amiably*: When yer stood by me on the platform yer said exactly the same, only you took longer to say it. But yer didn't do anythin'. Yer never have done anythin', an' now yer never will. Have a cigar?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Thanks, old boy, but I hate your fat cigars. What's more, I hate your buttonhole, your stock, your collar, your red cheeks, everything about you. But what's it matter? You're just a broad-ribbed, breezy, beefy-faced, old fraud.

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Am I? Dear, dear! Well, perhaps I am. But what with my buttonhole, red cheeks, etcetera, nobody's found it out. I often wondered whether I'd stay the course. Well, now, I suppose I shall. Got a match?

Sir Humphrey Haliburton supplies him.

RICHARD STAPP *pounding again*: We must DO something.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Try the other fist.

RICHARD STAPP: Prime Minister!

LORD VIVIAN VERE: That's the first time I ever heard Stapp appeal to the Prime Minister. *He laughs half-heartedly.*

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Stappy's got the pip;
He's lost the Premiership.

RICHARD STAPP *savagely*: Shut up! Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at the clock, and returns to the window.

LORD COSSINGTON *quietly*: That policeman, one, two, one, two——

RICHARD STAPP: Shut up! Isn't there anybody with guts? Hal! Dedham! Dunne! Dunne!

H. G. Dunne pays no attention.

Faulkiner! Blount! Form a quorum!

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Form a quorum! Dress by the right for the last trump! Delegation to God!

PRIME MINISTER *to himself in anguish*: Marjorie!

LORD COSSINGTON *counting*: One, two, three, four, turn . . . one, two . . .

RICHARD STAPP: Now then, you fellers, if you've still got some wits——

They get together.

What shall we DO? Faulkiner, you're a technician: can he do this? I suppose he can, eh?

ESME FAULKINER: Yes.

RICHARD STAPP: Think so, Blount?

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Damned if I know. S'pose so.

The others agree.

RICHARD STAPP: How? Clockwork thing, hidden somewhere?

ESME FAULKINER: Must be. We know he's speeded it up.

RICHARD STAPP: H'm. Follows he must control it? How?

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Where's he hidden it?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: I've got my men watching him. Since yesterday. Searched his room while he was at dinner, only that infernal Shelley under his pillow.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Damn Shelley. Hope I never hear of him again.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: The chances are you won't.

RICHARD STAPP: Anythin' else?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Got the valet to bring down his clothes while he was asleep.

Nothing but what anybody might have—except a notebook of mathematical symbols, a faded snap of his mother, and that old turnip of a watch.

LORD DEDHAM: I'll be damned!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Looks like the end.

LORD DEDHAM: Blast it; such things don't happen!

RICHARD STAPP: Then why's your eye on the clock?

ESME FAULKINER: I do hate this helpless feeling.

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at the clock, and returns to the window.

RICHARD STAPP: Dunne! Dunne! Dunne, you're an engineer. What do you make of it.?

H. G. DUNNE: Nothing. Flatly, I think he can do it.

RICHARD STAPP: How?

H. G. DUNNE: Damned if I know.

ESME FAULKINER: Perhaps he won't come back. Perhaps he's simply standing out there laughing at us.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Hell, I do hate his laughter!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *going to the window and beckoning*: No, he isn't. There—see? Beyond the car—my men are in that—next to the soldier in khaki.

ESME FAULKINER: By the railings?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Feeding the swan . . .

H. G. DUNNE: Look!

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Well, I'll be damned! Emptyin' his pockets . . . buyin' sweets from the ex-service man . . . givin' 'em ter the children!

LORD DEDHAM: Murderer! Blast him!

ESME FAULKINER: Seems to be telling the kids to hurry.

Pause. They glance at each other.

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at the clock and returns to the window.

RICHARD STAPP: An' now he's quite still, lookin' at the narcissi. Phew! *He wipes his forehead.*

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Arrest him, Hal!

LORD DEDHAM: Touch him, and the damned thing goes off!

H. G. DUNNE: Dished! Got us cold!

They turn away.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton remains at the window.

RICHARD STAPP: But how? How?

H. G. DUNNE: God knows. Can't we all feel it? He's all round us, over us, under us, outside there, and yet—somehow—in this room . . . It's foul, having nothing to pray to.

RICHARD STAPP: He MUST control it . . . an' our job is to get hold o' the control.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Catch him lettin' us.

ESME FAULKINER: You bet he's popped it somewhere, and it's ticking away.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: He can't have. My men are watching.

H. G. DUNNE: He may have left it in the house, on the way out——

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Or slipped it into the ex-service man's basket——

LORD DEDHAM: Or the children's bags of sweets——

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Or given it to the swan——

RICHARD STAPP *savagely*: Or swallowed it!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Even if you got it, you wouldn't know how to use it.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *with sepulchral mirth*: The Agenda having been read, and a resolution passed, the Committee adjourned. *Singing*:

"The Committee then adjourned, ha, ha!
The Committee then adjourned."

No one replies.

The Prime Minister crosses to look at the clock and returns to the window.

LORD COSSINGTON: One, two, three, four . . . *Suddenly.* I say, oughtn't we to warn the Palace?

H. G. DUNNE: Damn the Palace.

LORD COSSINGTON: Mr. Dunne! Well, yess . . . bye and large . . . all my life . . . S-scertainly, Mr. Dunne, damn the Palace! One, two, three. . . .

RICHARD STAPP *loud, addressing the Prime Minister*: I'm goin' home.

LORD DEDHAM: What for?

RICHARD STAPP: To see my wife.

Exit Richard Stapp.

LORD COSSINGTON: One, two, three, four, turn . . . one, two, three, four, turn . . . *He begins to sway.*

MATTHEW GRINDLE: My white darling . . . Yes, I will, too.

LORD DEDHAM: Your white darling? You fatuous ass—she's mine!

MATTHEW GRINDLE: What?

LORD DEDHAM: Didn't you know? That's funny! *Seeing Matthew Grindle's incredulous stare.* The mole on her right hip!

Matthew Grindle steps in his direction.

The old Adam still strong in the churchman, eh? Come on, then! Let's go to glory together!

MATTHEW GRINDLE *sitting down*: Churchman . . . you might have spared me that. Everything's collapsing . . . if I hadn't known . . . I might have . . . I was going to die happy . . . with her.

LORD DEDHAM: What do I care? Chance rules!

I broke the bank before the bank broke me. I've had my fun. Bow-wow! Let's spill the beans! Vere, your Education Bill's a highbrow fake! Blount, you ruined a better man to get those battleships, and didn't get 'em. Cossy, you're an asinine fop! Pascoe, you're a prig and a fool!

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at clock and returns to the window.

Grantly, you're the feeblest Prime Minister ever known.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Stop that baby bloodhound, somebody.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: I may be a prig, but I'm not scared.

LORD DEDHAM: Who's scared? Who says I'm scared?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Bow-wow! Why bay, then? You're just a double-dyed bounding blackguard with the wind up.

LORD DEDHAM: Bah! Same to you! Who's scared? Eh?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: You are. Too much fizz. Too many women! It's found you out. Your nerves can't stand it.

LORD DEDHAM *suddenly almost in tears*: Can yours?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: If Pascoe's can, mine can. I wouldn't have your conscience——

ST. JOHN PASCOE *coming up to Lord Dedham and speaking close to his face*: Liar. Bully. Cheat. Fornicator. *He strikes him across the face.* Strike back if you dare. Cad. *He pushes him into a chair.* Sit down, since you can't stand up. I'm one of the men you stepped up over. I may be a prig and a fool, but I give thanks I can face things without making an offensive exhibition of myself. I can die like a simple, honest, upright English gentleman. *He trembles so much that he drops his pince-nez.*

H. G. DUNNE: Honest! English! Gentleman! The number of times from slum to Cabinet I've heard those words! Personally I only feel like a man, and a helpless one.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Who cares what you feel?

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at clock and returns to the window.

Oh, God, my poor son! I contradicted him at breakfast.

H. G. DUNNE *taking off his coat*: Tch! It's hot in here.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Hot? I'm shivering.

H. G. DUNNE *pushing by the Prime Minister*: Excuse me, sir. I must have air. *He tries to push up the window.*

PRIME MINISTER *softly*: Go away.

H. G. DUNNE: But I tell you——

The Prime Minister points out into garden.

Oh, your grand-daughter . . . All right. *He pushes it up very softly.* Thanks. Odd, saying thanks . . . when . . .

EVELYN ARTHUR *lowering the book*: This beastly print——

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Human after all!

EVELYN ARTHUR: I trust you do not represent humanity! *He resumes his book.*

LORD COSSINGTON: One, two, three, four . . .

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Stop it. Worse than Big Ben.

LORD COSSINGTON: Big Ben! Big Ben! One, two, three, four . . .

MATTHEW GRINDLE *to himself*: That never fails. *Aloud.* I shall say the Lord's Prayer.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: The devil you will! A cigar, someone.

He finds himself facing Lord Sunningdale.

O Lord! All right. *He takes one.*

MATTHEW GRINDLE: "Our Father—" Who'll join me?

ST. JOHN PASCOE: "Are you saved?" Don't all speak at once.

Matthew Grindle, elbows desperately set on table, does his best to pray.

Lord Sunningdale, going in search of a spare chair, stumbles across the feet of Esme Faulkiner, who is seated with legs stretched out.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *testily*: Damn yer—take yer legs away, can't yer? *Absent-mindedly, as he pulls up a chair on the seat of which he places the pack of cards he draws from his capacious pocket.* No manners—nowadays. *He squares his shoulders to a game of patience.*

H. G. DUNNE *coat over arm, head up*: The big gesture! Meet it standing! The ship of humanity sinking. . . .

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Humanity be damned! Be British! *Puts something in his mouth.*

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Chewing gum? That's Yankee.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Hebrew-Greek for all I care.

H. G. Dunne pulls on his coat again and sits disgustedly down.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *to himself*: It's no good. *Standing up, with a would-be gallant air.* Won't anybody sing "Rock of Ages?"

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Rats. "Rule Britannia."

ST. JOHN PASCOE: Try jazz. "I Wanta be Happy." *He step-dances grotesquely.*

MATTHEW GRINDLE *all his piteous bravery knocked from under him*: O God, stop him, stop him!

ESME FAULKINER *suddenly rising and shouting*: Valhalla! Valhalla! I shall see him again!

Enter Richard Stapp unobtrusively.

LORD VIVIAN VERE *softly*: Wasn't she in?

RICHARD STAPP: No. *He sits at the table's end, hands thrust in pockets, sardonic.*

ESME FAULKINER: A man I burned in the air. *Dreamily*: A German Ace. *Harshly*: A brave son-of-

a-gun, by God. *Savagely*: Not a bleeding politician. If only there was something to shoot at! *He plumps disgustedly into a chair and takes up the stance of a pilot of a single-seater fighter. Suddenly, imitating a machine gun*: Tat-tat. Ratta-tat-tat . . . Down in flames . . . Phew . . . *he pulls the plane up.* Loop, barrel-roll, cart-wheel right . . . I'm in a spin—room's going round . . . *He slumps out of the chair on to the ground.*

Richard Stapp makes a movement, then sits back.

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at clock and returns to the window.

RICHARD STAPP *to Sir Humphrey Haliburton*: What's he doin'?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *without turning; he has gone back to the windows*: Still reading.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *viciously*: Shelley, I suppose.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Damn! *He tears the paper off another piece of chewing gum. Silence.*

H. G. DUNNE *softly*: What are you thinking of, Vere?

LORD VIVIAN VERE *in reverie*: The Chorus of Priests in the "Magic Flute." Mozart knew—to think I shall never hear that again.

Far off a barrel-organ has begun to play "The Minstrel Boy."

Esme Faulkiner pulls himself back into his chair and sits staring. Sometimes he makes passes with his hands.

ESME FAULKINER: Blast that barrel-organ; it puts the tune out of my head.

The barrel-organ's tune becomes clearer.

Mozart! Mozart! *He buries his face in his hands.*

Pause.

H. G. DUNNE: Hal, I thought you'd stopped them playing round here.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: It's farther off—the other side of Whitehall; I must see about it.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: "See about it!" "The Minstrel Boy to the War has gone!" *He laughs hysterically.*

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen, for the last time, I exert my authority. Silence, please. *He crosses to peer at the clock.* We have seven minutes left. If you can pray, pray for the soul of that deluded boy and give thanks for the beauty and bravery that have been on earth; failing that, at least preserve

man's dignity by silence. *He turns to the window again. Pause.*

The barrel-organ stops.

Pause.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *looking up, blanched, panicky*: How loud the buses sound! shaking the foundations. See things as they are. Concentrate. Concentrate. *He remains staring with hands clenched.*

The barrel-organ starts again, a new tune: "*Nearer my God to Thee.*"

They speak heavily, impersonally, as in a dream.

H. G. DUNNE: Now I know I shall find the thing, whatever it is, I've always missed.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *without looking round*: You'll find—ping! nothing.

H. G. DUNNE: It's the waiting hurts. *Desperately*: God, be kind and end it.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *laughing crazily*: Conversion of an eminent engineer! *Absently*: What a lot of fool faces—blank as fly-papers. *As if slightly puzzled*: I must have been drunk to believe in God—*solemnly*—or is He drunk and this His d.t.'s—*inconsequently*—Lord, I'm thirsty.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *his last card poised*: Just a chance——

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Not to know why I—why any of us—have lived. And now no one ever to know: I give it up.

LORD SUNNINGDALE *dully, shaking his head, as he gazes at the cards*: No, apparently. An' yet . . .

LORD COSSINGTON *stifling*: Big Ben! Tick, tock! My head! My head!

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at clock and returns to the window.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *softly, solving it*: An idle dream at best. Why can't my heart believe what my head has always known? *He gives a little shiver.* At last! And to think I thought I believed!

LORD VIVIAN VERE *whispering, groping with his hands*: Are you there, mother, are you there?

LORD SUNNINGDALE *slowly*: Neither now, nor ever. *Silence. Very gradually Lord Sunningdale pushes the cards, a few at a time, off the chair, staring at his spread hands all the while, till, at the end of the barrel-organ's refrain, no cards are left.*

The refrain ends.

Evelyn Arthur rises, gaunt, towering.

EVELYN ARTHUR *queerly, stretching out his arms*: "Even though it be a cross." . . . *He hurls the book away.*

The sound rouses them just sufficiently for all—save Richard Stapp, who sits tense—to turn dull eyes upon him. He speaks low, rapidly, and distinctly: Prime Minister, colleagues, I must testify to the truth before I go. . . . This boy is right. Nature, not he, has put Humanity on trial; and, because we have failed to evolve a faith adequate to our opportunities she rejects us for new experiments. That is the truth, and I am glad to have come to it.

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at the clock and returns to the window.

RICHARD STAPP *tilting his chair back, defiantly*: To the devil with your "Truth, Faith, Humanity!" Man can live without 'em.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Tell that—*points toward the window*—to the destroying angel. *He sits down, stern-faced, with his back to Richard Stapp.*

RICHARD STAPP *jumping up*: So the great Evelyn Arthur's whipped! Well, I'm not! Now perhaps you'll listen to me. Yesterday, this joy-boy said he'd destroy England at one o'clock; to-day he's speeding it up an' finishin' the world at noon. Consequently he has a control.

H. G. DUNNE: Oh, we've had all that out——

RICHARD STAPP: Shut up. He's not been out o' sight o' Hal's men since yesterday: so the control's *on* him. I'm goin' to get it.

LORD DEDHAM: You can't touch him!

RICHARD STAPP: That's just why I will. That *proves* he's got it.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: But——

RICHARD STAPP: Shut up. While you old women've been ditherin' I've been actin'. *His hand goes to his hip pocket. Vehemently banging the table.* Man is, an' always has been, the slave o' force! Blessed are the strong, for they shall inherit the earth! *He whips out a revolver and flourishes it above his head. Lowering it.* Now then. *He covers them. Most of them rise.*

You all in your hearts want him dead. Very well. Gimme a clear field o' fire. Don't any o' you pass before or behind me once he enters this room. *He moves round to the back of the table.*

The Prime Minister crosses to peer at the clock and returns to the window.

Stand away there. *He takes up his position, his*

whole attitude murderous. This is the life! Dedham, you open the door. Do what I say!

Lord Dedham obeys.

Now hold it. The moment he stands in that doorway, I shoot, an' shoot to kill.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *still at window*: He's up. He's coming this way. *Confused movement.*

RICHARD STAPP: Keep still. *Through his teeth*: An' don't you make any mistake: I'm not doin' this for humanity but for myself, the old original Satan you're all so ashamed of. *He raises the revolver to arm's length. Slowly growling.* Through—his—heart. *He carries the revolver back to the level of his arm-pit.*

LORD COSSINGTON *suddenly clutching the curtains*: Look out! *He staggers, all but drops, hiding his face with his hands.* Good God, the lorry!

RICHARD STAPP *without turning, stilly*: What is it?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *who has turned back to Lord Cossington*: Stand up, man.

Lord Cossington vaguely gestures.

What?

Lord Cossington slumps against the wall.

Sir Humphrey Haliburton suddenly pushes up the window, stares, then he turns gravely.

Lightfoot has been run over.

Tumult. Both left-hand windows fill.

Lord Cossington staggers to a chair and sits down.

RICHARD STAPP *to Lord Dedham*: Stay where you are.

Silent pause while those at the windows crane.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT *suddenly*: By God, he's lied. He's been touched, it hasn't gone off—we're safe!—we're safe! We're safe again!

An uproar of delight.

LORD DEDHAM: Good old lady luck!

Matthew Grindle, who has remained seated, suddenly laughs harshly and stares at Lord Dedham. Darkness of hate comes into his face. He laughs again.

H. G. DUNNE: They're picking him up.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: Killed.

Lord Cossington looks up, wipes sweat from his face, recovers.

ESME FAULKINER: Looks like it.

LORD VIVIAN VERE: See that arm hanging down?

H. G. DUNNE: Dead!

LORD COSSINGTON *suddenly rubbing his hands and walking up and down*: Well, well, that'ss that. Hooray! Glad we didn't warn the Palas-s.

PRIME MINISTER *with authority*: Everything that has been spoken in this room during the last twenty minutes is to be forgotten.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Yes, he's dead all right. They've taken off their hats. They're bringing him this way.

Richard Stapp, turning, places the revolver on the table, and crosses to the window.

Matthew Grindle, watching Lord Dedham, covertly appropriates the revolver.

RICHARD STAPP: Who's that older man comin' on ahead?

PRIME MINISTER: It looks like——

LORD VIVIAN VERE: It's Sir Henry Hand.

MATTHEW GRINDLE *taking Lord Dedham by the arm*: Dedham, see this? *He shows him the revolver.* It's for you. Monday morning, seven thirty, Calais sands.

LORD DEDHAM: Rats! *Disconcerted.* Pooh, where's your Christianity, man?

MATTHEW GRINDLE *menacingly close*: On the junk heap—where you're going.

LORD DEDHAM: Don't be a fool. Very well, I'll let daylight into you, if you insist—Monday morning—what?

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Monday; seven thirty; Calais. *Breaking the revolver.* Till then. *He pockets the cartridges.*

LORD VIVIAN VERE: They're coming in here through the garden.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: That's Forster, the Superintendent. He has a key.

Enter Sir Henry Hand hurriedly.

SIR HENRY HAND: Excuse me, where's the Prime Minister?

LORD DEDHAM: Over there.

SIR HENRY HAND: Oh, Mr. Grantly, I am sorry to say there has been an accident.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

SIR HENRY HAND: I was in my car going to the Ministry of Health. Your nephew . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

SIR HENRY HAND: A lorry caught him; he never even knew it—he was crossing the road, putting a book into his pocket; some problem, I suppose.

PRIME MINISTER: Is he . . .?

SIR HENRY HAND: Virtually. Ribs stove in; punctured lungs; leg broken—a matter of moments. I told them to bring him in here.

PRIME MINISTER *with difficulty*: Certainly.

RICHARD STAPP *looking for revolver*: Where the devil . . .

ST. JOHN PASCOE *to Richard Stapp*: Saved you the trouble.

SIR HENRY HAND *to Prime Minister*: He's unconscious. It isn't likely he'll . . .

RICHARD STAPP *to himself*: Where is it?

H. G. DUNNE *generally*: Best clear the table.

ST. JOHN PASCOE *to Richard Stapp*: Don't be an ass, he's . . .

RICHARD STAPP *to St. John Pascoe*: I don't trust him.

Busy hands clear the table, and Richard Stapp is swept away.

LORD DEDHAM *at door*: Here they come.

A hush falls.

A Superintendent of Police enters, followed by figures carrying the body of Francis Lightfoot.

Francis Lightfoot is laid on the table.

All draw away from the table, save Sir Henry Hand, The Prime Minister, Evelyn Arthur and Richard Stapp.

The Superintendent stands irresolute.

PRIME MINISTER *to Superintendent*: Thank you. *To the others*: Thank you, Gentlemen.

They go out.

SIR HENRY HAND *to the Prime Minister*: We can do nothing—a matter of moments.

RICHARD STAPP *to Sir Henry Hand*: Are you quite sure he is unconscious?

SIR HENRY HAND: My opinion, Mr. Stapp, is not usually disputed. He may just possibly have a moment of consciousness before the end, but it's not likely. *To the Prime Minister*: Don't let him move or sit up, or the blood will enter his ruptured lung, and drown him instantaneously. *Glancing at the*

clock: Good gracious! is that the time—a minute to twelve; twenty minutes late already. Good-by, Mr. Grantly. A great loss to science, you have my sympathy. A genius and a charming young man.

Sir Henry Hand goes.

Silence.

Francis Lightfoot, unconscious, murmurs mathematical symbols.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT: D two chi by D T squared minus C delta squared chi equals . . . naught.

RICHARD STAPP: Gibberish, eh?

EVELYN ARTHUR: No. Clark Maxwell's formulation of the Theory of Light; pure beauty.

RICHARD STAPP: Pure bunk.

LORD DEDHAM *tugging Richard Stapp's sleeve*: Dick, old man.

Richard Stapp turns.

Lord Dedham beckons him away, and they confer together; Lord Dedham covertly pointing to Matthew Grindle, whispers to Richard Stapp, and in pantomime, taps his own pocket.

Richard Stapp glances covertly at Matthew Grindle. Francis Lightfoot murmurs again.

EVELYN ARTHUR *with profound grief*: "Qualis artifex pereo!" *He turns away to the mantelpiece.*

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT *who has been hovering*: You didn't fancy the wart on my nose, but I'll say this for you, young man, you had guts. *He blows his nose, turning away.*

The Prime Minister sinks to his knees.

All the others turn their backs.

The Prime Minister bows his head in prayer.

Silence.

LORD COSSINGTON *suddenly squealing*: My God, I understand: it'll go off! Blount'ss wrong. He s-set it! It'll go off! Anyway, in ten s-seconds!

Panic; uproar.

With a small pinging sound the clock begins to strike twelve.

At the first stroke, a deathly silence falls.

Francis Lightfoot moves his head a little. With the striking clock, sentience comes into his face, which now, for the first time, is seen ghastly and streaked with blood. Slowly from the waist, like a marionette, he begins to sit up.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *low*: Farewell, hapless humanity.

RICHARD STAPP *appalled*: God! *Suddenly he leaps at Matthew Grindle, seizes the revolver from his pocket, and fires at Francis Lightfoot. The lock clicks on the empty barrels; the revolver falls from his hand.*

The clock continues striking.

Francis Lightfoot's hand, already in his bosom, draws out his watch.

FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT *louder, unaware of Richard Stapp*: Hail, new dimensions! *Aloud*: We go to the Eternal Mind! *He sits up, violently, holds up the watch, falls back.*

EVELYN ARTHUR *jumping*: Catch it! *He catches the watch.*

All move.

Evelyn Arthur holds the watch forward at arm's length.

Last three strokes of the clock.

Silence.

The tension breaks. Evelyn Arthur passes his hand across his forehead.

A narrow squeak, gentlemen, a damned uncommonly narrow squeak.

LORD COSSINGTON and RICHARD STAPP

simultaneously: I told you s-so, that ass S-Stapp——I told you so, that ass Grindle . . .

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: What is it, Arthur?

EVELYN ARTHUR *blandly*: Nothing, now.

H. G. DUNNE: Dead?

EVELYN ARTHUR: Yes. *Pause.*

LORD COSSINGTON: Are you quite s-sure? But I don't understand; let's s-see. *He tries to take the watch from Evelyn Arthur.*

ESME FAULKINER *pulling Lord Cossington back*: Keep back, you fool!

LORD COSSINGTON: You don't think——?

EVELYN ARTHUR *sweetly*: Like me to try?

LORD SUNNINGDALE: This ain't the time for humor, Arthur.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Here, Faulkiner, you're a technician. *He makes to hand him the watch.*

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Carefully, man, carefully.

ESME FAULKINER *taking it*: You bet.

H. G. DUNNE: What do you make of it?

ESME FAULKINER *turning it over*: A dummy watch. H'm, let's see. *He makes to open it.*

LORD DEDHAM: Lord, man, don't open it.

ESME FAULKINER: It's ticking; I don't trust it.

Sensation.

ST. JOHN PASCOE: For God's sake, be careful.

ESME FAULKINER *opening the back*: By Jove, a pretty piece of work.

H. G. Dunne leans over his shoulder.

Ah! I've got it—wireless!

H. G. DUNNE: Yes, by God, a wireless.

ESME FAULKINER *explanatorily*: A wireless set, similar to those by which we direct aeroplanes from the ground. Long-distance control.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Where's his current?

ESME FAULKINER: Generated by the release of a microscopic speck of atomic energy—yes, that must be it. There's a tiny bit of apparatus here, of which I can make nothing. *He peers.*

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Easy, easy!

ESME FAULKINER: All right, now for the control.

H. G. Dunne points.

Yes; I'll have to work by inference. Let me see. *He peers.*

LORD COSSINGTON: But I . . .

H. G. DUNNE: Ssh!

The "ssh" spreads. All are silent and attentive.

ESME FAULKINER: I have it. *Explanatorily*: There are two controls—one for *what* he will destroy, the other for *when* he will destroy it. We know the machine is set for *world*-destruction; so that's that. Now for the *when*. There are only three possible positions for a time control; one—instantaneous, but it didn't go off instantaneously—our presence here proves it; two, safety; three, a timed explosion; and this pointer—*to Dunne*—see?

H. G. DUNNE: Isn't that beautiful?

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Beautiful! Good God!

ESME FAULKINER: This pointer indicates that the machine is now set for a timed explosion.

Alarm.

But you need not be alarmed; the pointer points exactly to noon. It is now, *looking at the clock*, four minutes past; therefore, though the *machine* is set for a timed explosion, the *control* is not in operation.

Why? The thing's not out of order; it's going. There is only one alternative left: the control is in the only other position it is physically possible for it to occupy. Francis Lightfoot wished to go from time to instantaneous; his great final gesture—death froze his fingers in mid-journey—where? at safety.

The tension breaks. Applause.

LORD COSSINGTON: I understand. It's very s-simple.

ESME FAULKINER: Simple as death itself. If, however, he had lived one split-second more . . . *He completes the statement with a gesture.* Gentlemen, a control with only an eighth of an inch to travel is a delicate thing; allow me. *He places the watch on the mantelpiece.*

H. G. DUNNE: We'll get Charlton and Eldridge on that.

EVELYN ARTHUR: I think not. How deep is the Atlantic, Blount?

A Messenger enters with an envelope.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes?

The Messenger gives him the envelope.

SIR ROMILLY BLOUNT: Some miles.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Very well. "Deeper than ever plummet sounded . . . "

MATTHEW GRINDLE: Well, that's over, thank heaven. *With a look at Lord Dedham*: At least . . . Now for my Budget, Mr. Grantly . . .

PRIME MINISTER: One moment. *To the Messenger*: "Urgent." Who brought it?

MESSENGER: I don't know, sir. A tall, authoritative-looking gentleman; dark—said you must have it at once.

PRIME MINISTER: Very well.

The Messenger goes.

PRIME MINISTER *opens the envelope*: What's this nonsense? Some new Trade Union, I suppose. *Reading*: "From the Guild of United Brain-Workers of the World." What's that, Dunne?

H. G. DUNNE: Never heard of it.

PRIME MINISTER: Here. *Hands it to H. G. Dunne.*

EVELYN ARTHUR *dreamily*: The clock, to the great scandal of all hopeful souls, having been set back, the tortoise humanity will now cover its inch during the ensuing century.

H. G. DUNNE *excited*: I say! I say!

PRIME-MINISTER: Well?

H. G. DUNNE: But it's . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Read it.

H. G. DUNNE: "To the Prime Minister and Cabinet of Great Britain, from the Guild of United Brain-Workers of the World, secretly assembled in Geneva. The Guild informs the Prime Minister that it is aware that a scientist outside the Guild has proved he can control the atom . . ."

LORD DEDHAM: What? How did they know?

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Geneva!

ESME FAULKINER: Charlton and Eldridge!

H. G. DUNNE: "The Guild hereby gives notice that this secret has, owing to the co-ordination of immense labors, been known to it for three years. The Guild has prepared its program. And it serves notice that it requires the attendance of the Prime Minister and such of his associates as he shall select, at Geneva, immediately. Their function will be purely advisory, not executive; their employment will only continue until the individuals already in training, under the Guild's supervision, are ready to take over. The Guild, obviously, is in a position to enforce its demands. A similar notice is being served simultaneously on every Chancellory of every civ-

ilized country in the world." *He pauses.* It's signed by every imaginable scientist. *Inconsequently*: My God, what queer names those beggars do have.

RICHARD STAPP *peering over H. G. Dunne's shoulder*: Charlton and Eldridge at the head of the list!—Hello, there's a postscript.

The drone of aeroplanes is faintly heard.

H. G. DUNNE *reading*: "Six aeroplanes are over you as you read this. They contain atomic bombs. Such bombs hang over the capitals of every civilized country."

ESME FAULKINER: What?

RICHARD STAPP: Ssh! Listen!

The drone of aeroplanes grows louder and louder.

Richard Stapp dashes to the window.

Green! Enormous! They're right over us.

All, save Evelyn Arthur, crowd to the windows.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *at the back of the crowd*: Damn them; they're as bad as Lightfoot.

EVELYN ARTHUR *softly, to the corpse*: Five minutes past twelve. The clock cannot be set back. If not you, Francis . . . another.

LORD DEDHAM: Give me room; don't crowd so!

The sound of the aeroplanes dies down.

EVELYN ARTHUR: Nature doesn't often give us a second chance. *He glances at the mantelpiece. To the corpse, in reverie*: Perhaps She believes in us, even if we don't believe in ourselves.

RICHARD STAPP: I can't see; they're in the sun.

PRIME MINISTER: Gentlemen, those wings even now sound over Europe. Are we with them or against them?

EVELYN ARTHUR *to the corpse*: Thank you, Francis. *He bends down, kisses the face, closes the eyes. Then he takes the watch from the mantelpiece.*

PRIME MINISTER: What is our reply?

Evelyn Arthur makes for the door. As he looks at the unconscious backs of his colleagues, a last flicker of Puck comes over him. He raises his arm, as if to throw the watch like a bomb.

Richard Stapp turns about.

RICHARD STAPP: Hello! Where are you off to?

EVELYN ARTHUR *fiddling with the lock, tersely*: Geneva.

They gape.

LORD DEDHAM *sarcastically*: Advisory or executive?

EVELYN ARTHUR: We shall see. *The door slams behind him.*

H. G. DUNNE *running after Evelyn Arthur*: Arthur, wait for me! I, too, have hope. *He rattles the door.* Locked!

ESME FAULKINER: My God, he's taken it!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: Taken what?

RICHARD STAPP: It! the thing! the Watch! *Striking his breast*: O God damn! why didn't I get it?

The roar of a car's cut-out.

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON *at the window, highly excited*: There he goes! Out past the Admiralty. Stepping on the gas like a kid!

Most crowd again to the windows.

ESME FAULKINER: Croydon aerodrome at sixty an hour!

SIR HUMPHREY HALIBURTON: By God, I love that man!

LORD SUNNINGDALE: Hooray! Good luck to him! Hooray!

LORD DEDHAM *savagely*: Idiot! Geneva! Between them, the end!

H. G. DUNNE *in a ringing voice*: No gentlemen, between them, if Man can find faith, the Beginning!

Richard Stapp continues staring at the empty mantelpiece. The Prime Minister, bending down, gazes wistfully into his dead nephew's face.

All the rest advance to the windows in varying attitudes, some scowling, with hands thrust into pockets, as if expectant of calamity, some with hands raised as if to welcome a supreme hope.

The roar of aeroplanes fills the entire theater.

THE END.

NOTE

It was deemed advisable by the Theatre Guild to make certain changes in the ending of WINGS OVER EUROPE, for stage presentation purposes. In order that the people who have seen the production of WINGS OVER EUROPE shall not be confused by the very different ending in the play as written for reading purposes, the variant ending, as used by the Theatre Guild, is herewith given.

STAPP: Keep still.

All stop moving.

And don't make any mistake: I'm not doing this for humanity but for myself, the old original Satan you're all so ashamed of.

Facing door.

Through—his—heart.

Grindle is by his chair. Cossington and Faulkiner are at the downstage window, left. The Prime Minister is standing by Haliburton's chair. Dunne is up, left center. Vere and Pascoe are at the fire, left of it. Arthur is standing by chair, right of the fire. Dedham is by the upstage column, Blount by the downstage column. Stapp is at center below the table. Haliburton is left of the table. Sunningdale is at center of the table. As they see Lightfoot in the hallway, right, they face the doors. Stapp, who has the revolver in his hand, puts it behind his back with a quick movement. They all straighten up and await Lightfoot's entrance. As he crosses the threshold, Stapp shoots him and motions the others to clear a

space in the center of the table, on which to put Lightfoot's body. Dedham and Blount catch Lightfoot as he falls and place him on table. Stapp, who is center below the table, to Blount: Blount, lock the door. *Blount does so and returns to the top of the table to the right of the others, who are grouped around Lightfoot's body at the top of the table, with the exception of Stapp, who is still below and center of it. As the shot is fired, the organ plays and continues until Blount has locked the door and is back at the table.*

LIGHTFOOT: D two chi by D T squared minus C delta squared chi equals . . . nought.

They are all looking at Lightfoot.

STAPP: Gibberish, eh?

ARTHUR: No. Clark Maxwell's formulation of the Theory of Light: pure beauty.

STAPP: Pure bunk.

ARTHUR: "Qualis artifex pereo."

LIGHTFOOT: Farewell, hapless humanity. We go to the eternal mind.

Rises and takes out watch, then sinks back.

STAPP: That's it.

FAULKINER: That must be the control.

ARTHUR *leaning over Lightfoot*: Catch it!

All stretch their hands out to get the watch.

COSSINGTON: By God: it will go off.

ARTHUR *holding up watch in his two hands*: A narrow squeak, gentlemen, a damned, uncommonly narrow squeak.

DUNNE: Dead?

ARTHUR: Yes. Dead.

COSSINGTON: Are you quite sure? But I don't understand. Let's see.

Comes forward.

FAULKINER: Keep back, you fool.

ARTHUR *handing watch to Faulkiner*: Here Faulkiner, you're a technician.

HALIBURTON: Carefully, man, carefully.

FAULKINER *taking watch*: You bet.

DUNNE: What do you make of it?

FAULKINER *turning watch over*: Looks like a plain watch. H'm, let's see.

STAPP: Plain as hell!

HALIBURTON: That old watch; and to think that I held it in my hand.

DEDHAM: Lord, man, don't open it.

FAULKINER: It's ticking.

PASCOE: For God's sake, be careful.

HALIBURTON: Well, how does it work?

FAULKINER: Ah! I've got it—wireless!

DUNNE: Yes, by God, a wireless.

FAULKINER: A wireless set, similar to those by which we direct aeroplanes from the ground. Long-distance control.

BLOUNT: Where's the current?

FAULKINER: Generated by the release of a microscopic speck of atomic energy—yes, that must be it. There's a tiny bit of apparatus here, of which I can make nothing.

SUNNINGDALE: Easy, easy.

COSSINGTON: But I . . .

DUNNE: Ssh!

FAULKINER: I have it. Here is the control. This pointer, here, indicates the machine is set for an instantaneous explosion. All Lightfoot had to do was to press this spring: that would have been the end. Death froze his fingers in mid-journey.

BLOUNT: We're safe—we're safe—we're safe again!

DEDHAM: Good old Lady Luck!

COSSINGTON: I understand, it's quite simple.

FAULKINER: Simple as death itself. Gentlemen, a control with only an eighth of an inch to travel is a delicate thing; allow me.

He places watch on mantel.

DUNNE: We'll get Charlton and Eldridge on that.

ARTHUR: I think not. How deep is the Atlantic, Blount?

BLOUNT: Some miles.

ARTHUR: Very well. "Deeper than ever plummet sounded . . ."

GRINDLE: Well, that's over, thank heaven.

BLOUNT: I'll say this for you, young man, you had guts.

Sits in Dunne's chair.

COSSINGTON: Well, that's that. Hurrah! Glad we didn't warn the Palace.

PRIME MINISTER: Everything that has been

spoken in this room during the last twenty minutes is to be forgotten.

ARTHUR: The clock, to the great scandal of all hopeful souls, having been set back, the tortoise humanity will now cover it's inch during the ensuing century.

They all look away. Slight pause. Messenger knocks on door. Pause. Messenger repeats knock. Stapp crosses to door, unlocks it, and goes into hall.

STAPP: What is it?

MESSENGER *in hall*: For the Prime Minister.

STAPP: Who brought it?

MESSENGER: I don't know, Sir. A tall, dark gentleman; he said it was urgent.

STAPP: Very well. *Takes letter, re-enters room, locks door; takes letter to Prime Minister.*

PRIME MINISTER: What's this? *Reading the envelope*, "Urgent." "From the League of United Scientists of the World." What's that? *Handing letter to Dunne.* Dunne.

DUNNE: Never heard of it. I say! I say!

PRIME MINISTER: Well?

DUNNE: But it's . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Read it.

DUNNE: "To the Prime Minister and Cabinet of Great Britain, from the League of United Scientists of the World, secretly assembled in Geneva. The League informs the Prime Minister that it is aware a scientist outside the League has proved he can control the atom . . ."

Off stage noise of planes.

DEDHAM: What? How did they know?

HALIBURTON: Geneva!

FAULKINER: Charlton and Eldridge.

DUNNE *reading*: "You are hereby given notice that, after years of co-ordinated labour, the League, also, has just discovered the secret of the Atom. The League has prepared it's programme. And it serves notice that it requires the attendance of the Prime Minister and such of his associates as he shall select, at Geneva immediately. The League, obviously, is in a position to enforce its demands. A similar notice is being served simultaneously on the Chancellories of every civilized country in the world."

STAPP *peering over Dunne's shoulder*: Charlton and Eldridge at the head of the list. Hello, there's a postscript.

The drone of aeroplanes is faintly heard.

Second planes start.

DUNNE *reading*: "Six aeroplanes are over you as you read this. They contain atomic bombs. Such bombs hang over the capitols of every civilized country."

FAULKINER: What?

STAPP: Ssh! Listen!

Noise of planes louder.

Stapp dashes to the window.

Green! Enormous! They're right over us.

All save Arthur crowd to the windows.

HALIBURTON *at back of crowd*: Damn them; they're as bad as Lightfoot.

ARTHUR *softly, to the corpse*: Five minutes past twelve. The clock cannot be set back. If not you, Francis . . . another.

DEDHAM: Give me room; don't crowd me!

ARTHUR: Nature doesn't often give us a second chance. Perhaps she believes in us, even if we don't believe in ourselves.

STAPP: I can't see; they're in the sun.

ARTHUR *to the corpse*: Thank you, Francis. *He bends down, kisses the face, then he takes the watch from the mantelpiece.*

PRIME MINISTER *left of table*: Gentlemen, those wings even now sound over Europe. Are we with them, or against them? What is our reply?

All talk. Arthur makes for the door right. As he looks at the unconscious backs of his colleagues, a last flicker of Puck comes over him. He raises his arm as if to throw the watch like a bomb. Pause. Stapp turns about, faces right.

STAPP *crosses to right center below table*: Hello! Where are you off to?

ARTHUR *fiddling with the lock, tersely*: Geneva. *They gape. The door slams behind him. Stapp, Dedham, and others come forward to right and left center. Blount, Dunne, Prime Minister, Faulkiner, Sunningdale, Vere—Lightfoot on table—Stapp, Dedham, Pascoe, Grindle, Cossington, Haliburton.*

DUNNE *running after Arthur, right*: Arthur, wait for me! I, too, have hope. *He rattles the door.* Locked!

All move a step or so to right.

FAULKINER: My God, he's taken it!

HALIBURTON: Taken what?

STAPP: It! The thing! The watch! *Striking his breast.* O, God damn! Why didn't I get it?

The roar of a car's cut-out.

HALIBURTON *at the window, highly excited*: There he goes! Out past the Admiralty. Stepping on the gas like a kid!

FAULKINER: Croydon aerodrome at sixty an hour!

HALIBURTON: By God, I love that man!

SUNNINGDALE: Hooray!

DUNNE: Good luck to him! Hooray!

DEDHAM *savagely*: Idiot! Geneva! Between them, the end!

All face table.

PRIME MINISTER *in a ringing voice*: No, gentlemen, between them, if Man can find faith, the Beginning!

The roar of planes fills the entire theatre.

CURTAIN